

# KINDERGARTEN READINESS 2021



## FALL ASSESSMENT FINDINGS IN SANTA CLARA COUNTY



Santa Clara County  
Office of Education

# Acknowledgements

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Of course, this assessment would not be possible without the support of the participating kindergarten teachers who generously gave their time and energy to help us better understand the skills of the children entering their classrooms. ASR gratefully acknowledges the assistance of the many individuals listed in the following table.

## Participating Schools and Teachers

School	Teacher
Abraham Lincoln	Patricia Nguyen
Alexander Rose	Xuanthao Tran
Campbell School of Innovation	Kylie Ziolkowski
Capri	Tayo Enna
Captain Jason M. Dahl	Edgar Quiroz Medrano
Cesar Chavez	Jane DeJesus
D. J. Sedgwick	Annette Lowe
Donald J. Meyer	Jill McKie
G. W. Hellyer	Ngocanh Bui Nguyen
Joseph Weller	Anna Tran
Katherine R. Smith	Henry Nguyen
	Meghna Venkatesh
Linda Vista	Lily Chang

School	Teacher
Los Alamitos	Caitlin Goldman
Lowell	Jamie Hales
LUCHA	Lisa Rogers
	Kimi Hiroshima
Monta Loma	Samantha Shellhammer
P. A. Walsh	Blossom Dorsey
	Shannon Eaton
Robert Randall	Diana Gonzalez
Santee	Tina Aberg
	Kimberly Leonhardt
Stipe (Samuel)	Maricena Hernandez
Willow Glen	Janelle Shoan

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# Snapshot of the 2021 School Readiness Assessment Results

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## Background

In 2018, the first countywide School Readiness Assessment (SRA) in 10 years took place in Santa Clara County. Based on the *Kindergarten Observation Form (KOF)*, a teacher-administered school readiness assessment of children entering kindergarten, 50% of children in the county were *Fully Ready* for kindergarten that year.<sup>i</sup> Parents/caregivers were also surveyed that year about their child's demographics, family background, and early childhood experiences. Due to stay-at-home orders resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, the *KOF* could not be completed in 2020, but instead, a countywide kindergarten parent/caregiver survey was conducted to identify the ways in which children and families had been impacted by COVID-19. As expected, compared to 2018, a significantly greater proportion of families surveyed in 2020 reported experiencing a variety of stressors, and across nearly all indicators, racial/ethnic and socioeconomic disparities were found.<sup>ii</sup>

Schools transitioned back to in-person learning in the 2021-22 school year, and FIRST 5 Santa Clara County and the Santa Clara County Office of Education decided to sponsor an SRA utilizing the *KOF* and a parent/caregiver survey. The purpose of the assessment was to determine how readiness has changed since 2018 and how families in Santa Clara County are faring as the community continues to be impacted by the pandemic. In fall 2021, 17 kindergarten teachers assessed 291 children in the county on 20 kindergarten readiness skills, which covered three primary skill domains: *Self-Regulation*, *Social Expression*, and *Kindergarten Academics*. Parents/caregivers also filled out a survey about their child's demographics, family background, and child care experiences, and how the family had been impacted by COVID-19.

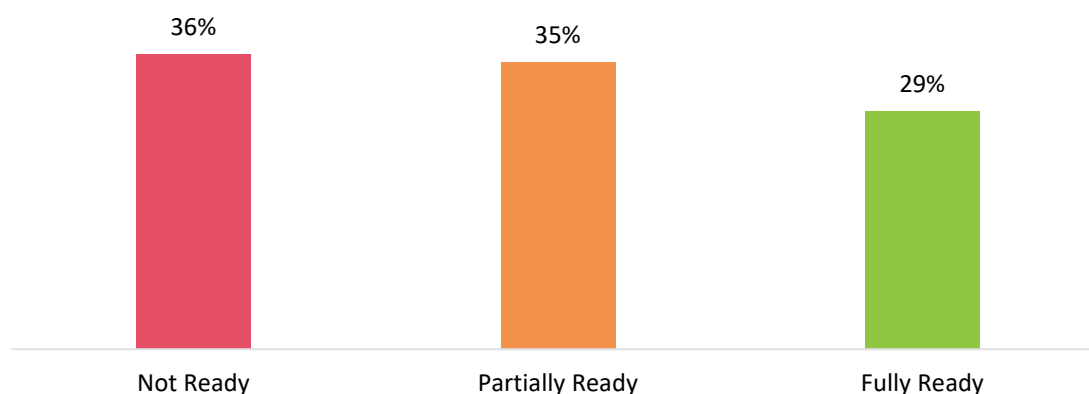
It should be noted that the sample this year is much smaller than it was in 2018 when 1,253 kindergarten students from 66 classrooms participated, and the information presented in this report only describes the students and families who participated in the assessment. Although the data presented here have been statistically adjusted to approximate the demographic makeup of the county population of kindergartners, the sample was not representative, and thus the findings should not be extrapolated to the broader population of approximately 19,000 kindergartners in the county.

## Key Findings

### ***How ready for school were children assessed in Santa Clara County?***

Children who scored 3.25 or higher on the assessment in all of the three primary domains were considered *Fully Ready* and made up 29% of the Santa Clara County sample in 2021, whereas 36% of children in Santa Clara County were *Not Ready*, meaning they scored below 3.25 in all three domains. The remaining 35% of the sample was *Partially Ready*, having scored at least 3.25 in one or two of the domains.

Figure 1. **Readiness Profile**

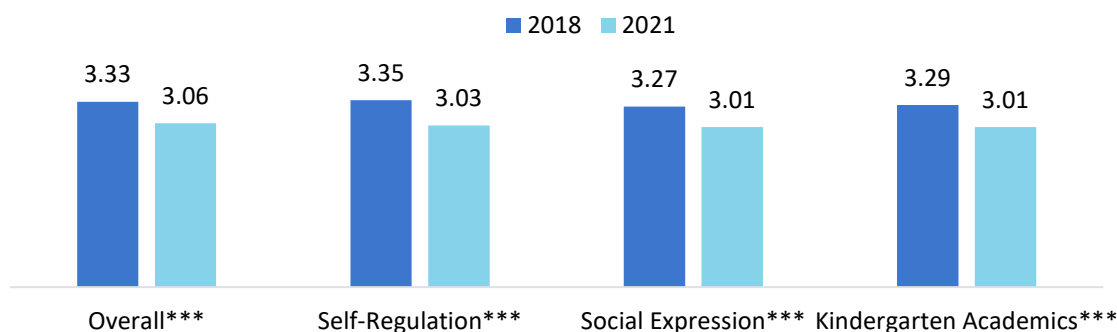


Source: Kindergarten Observation Form.

Note: N = 283 (unweighted). Sampling weights are applied to approximate the distributions of race/ethnicity and English Learner status of kindergarten students in Santa Clara County.

There was a significant drop in readiness between 2018 and 2021 (in 2018, 50% of children assessed were *Fully Ready* for kindergarten). The figure that follows shows the average readiness scores overall and on each domain in each assessment year, after statistically adjusting for differences in the sample. The drop in average scores in 2021 could be attributed to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and to sample differences that adjustments could not fully account for.

Figure 2. **Average Readiness, by Domain and Year**



Source: Kindergarten Observation Form.

Note: N = 585-614 (2018, unweighted); N = 176-182 (2021, unweighted). Assessment not conducted in 2020. Average scores could range from 1 to 4. Sampling weights are applied to approximate the distributions of race/ethnicity and English Learner status of kindergarten students in Santa Clara County. Model controls for child race/ethnicity, gender, age, English language learner status, special needs, and family income. \*\*\*Differences are statistically significant,  $p < .001$ .

### ***What child and family factors are associated with higher levels of school readiness?***

The factors that were strongly and independently associated with readiness in one or both of the past two readiness studies are described below. Although many of these factors are related to one another, each one contributes to readiness even after taking into account the contributions of the other factors. For example, the correlation between child health and well-being and readiness is significant, regardless of the family's socioeconomic status.

Some of the factors associated with readiness were demographic, including the child being older at the time of the assessment, being female, and identifying as White or Asian American/Pacific Islander. The differences between ethnic/racial groups are likely due to structural barriers and availability of



community supports and resources. Thus, schools should be ready for the population of children they are receiving.

Other factors that were strongly associated with school readiness are experiences that can be modified with intervention; these include access to early learning and kindergarten transition supports, child health and well-being, access to parent/caregiver education and support, and family income and access to basic needs.

Figure 3. **Factors Associated with School Readiness in Recent Santa Clara County Readiness Studies**

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Early learning and kindergarten transition supports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Child attended licensed <b>early care and education</b> (ECE)<sup>1</sup></li><li>• Parent/caregiver attended a <b>kindergarten orientation</b><sup>2</sup></li></ul>
Child health and well-being	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Child comes to school <b>healthy, well-rested, and well-fed</b>, and has consistent attendance, according to the child's teacher<sup>3</sup></li><li>• Child is exposed to <b>less screen time</b> and has an <b>early bedtime</b><sup>3</sup></li><li>• Child demonstrates <b>resilience</b> (e.g., able to adjust well to changes in routine and calm themselves when upset)<sup>1</sup></li></ul>
Parent/caregiver education and support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Parent/caregiver has <b>few concerns about parenting</b> their child (i.e., "not at all" or only "a little" concerned about managing their child's behavior),<sup>2</sup></li><li>• Parent/caregiver <b>received education or information about what to expect</b> at each developmental stage<sup>2</sup></li></ul>
Income and basic needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Family has <b>higher income</b><sup>3</sup></li><li>• Family has <b>stable housing</b> (i.e., has not experienced homelessness in the child's lifetime)<sup>1</sup></li></ul>

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<sup>1</sup> Independently associated with readiness in 2018.

<sup>2</sup> Independently associated with readiness in 2021.

<sup>3</sup> Independently associated with readiness in 2018 and 2021.

### ***How were children and families affected by COVID-19?***

As observed earlier, school readiness was lower in 2021 compared to 2018. This could be related to the increased levels of stress families experienced and the fact that children had fewer options for enrichment outside of the home during COVID-19. For example, the majority of families in this study experienced changes to their employment during the pandemic, such as having their work hours reduced, losing their job, or having to work from home with children around. In 2021, approximately four in five families reported pandemic-related effects on their employment, with lower-income families and Latino/a families reporting higher rates of job loss, reduction in work hours or wages, and having a job that put them at risk of getting COVID-19 relative to other families. In addition, the study found families were significantly more stressed about issues like health and making ends meet during the height of the pandemic in 2020 than they were in 2018. Caregiver reports of stress declined in 2021, but health-related concerns remained above pre-pandemic levels.

The pandemic also affected families' home routines and access to kindergarten preparation opportunities. Perhaps because of COVID-19-related closures and social distancing recommendations that required families to stay at home more, over six in 10 parents/caregivers in the current year were concerned about finding enough fun and engaging activities for their children, and children in 2021 had significantly more screen time than they did in 2018. Parents/caregivers were also less likely to have received kindergarten readiness information and accessed kindergarten transition supports like kindergarten orientations and parent-teacher meetings. The ECE experience of many children was also disrupted by the pandemic; among those who left a program in 2021, the primary reason was that the program closed due to COVID-19.

Finally, access to health care was a challenge for some families during COVID-19. Although the vast majority of children in this study had received medical care in the past year and were up-to-date on their immunizations, approximately one-quarter of parents/caregivers said they had to delay getting medical care for their child during COVID-19.

### ***What will it take to “turn the curve” on school readiness in Santa Clara County?***

The current study is a snapshot of readiness based on a small sample and future studies with larger samples will be needed to develop a complete picture of readiness in Santa Clara County. Nevertheless, the findings can be used to support the community's recovery from COVID-19 and sustain and stabilize early childhood systems, including ECE. While we saw some improvements in families' experiences in 2021 relative to 2020, recovery from the pandemic has been gradual, and its lingering effects may continue to impact children's readiness for school. Children and families continue to need support to address the challenges caused by the pandemic. In particular, partners in the community should provide quality services and supports that promote the positive early experiences that are associated with school readiness and that have been most significantly impacted by the pandemic. These include, but are not limited to, access to early learning and kindergarten transition supports, medical and mental health supports, parent/caregiver education and support, and income and basic needs supports. In addition, schools need to be prepared to meet the needs of all children entering their classrooms, including those who had access to fewer resources and supports to prepare them for school.



## Early Learning and Kindergarten Transition Supports

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As utilization of kindergarten transition supports like parent/caregiver meetings and orientation sessions is positively associated with readiness, the availability of such supports at schools and early learning sites should be expanded. In addition, high-quality ECE has historically been associated with kindergarten readiness, but children's access to it was more limited during the pandemic due to ECE site closures and fewer in-person learning opportunities. Expanding access to affordable ECE and stabilizing this essential system should be a priority in the county.



## Medical and Mental Health Services

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Children's health and well-being is consistently linked to higher kindergarten readiness. COVID-19 led to an increased need for healthcare and mental health care services and introduced new challenges in accessing these services, including increased use of telemedicine, staff shortages, and reduced capacity at clinics and hospitals to offer routine care. The healthcare system should be strengthened and access barriers reduced (e.g., lack of technology or transportation) so that services are more affordable and accessible for families.



## Support for Parents and Caregivers

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Children benefit when their caregivers are informed and supported: children in this study had higher readiness when their caregivers had fewer parenting concerns and received more information about child development. As their child's first teacher, parents and caregivers need services like parent education, peer support, and parent leadership programs to help them provide a healthy, nurturing early environment at home.



## Income and Basic Needs Supports

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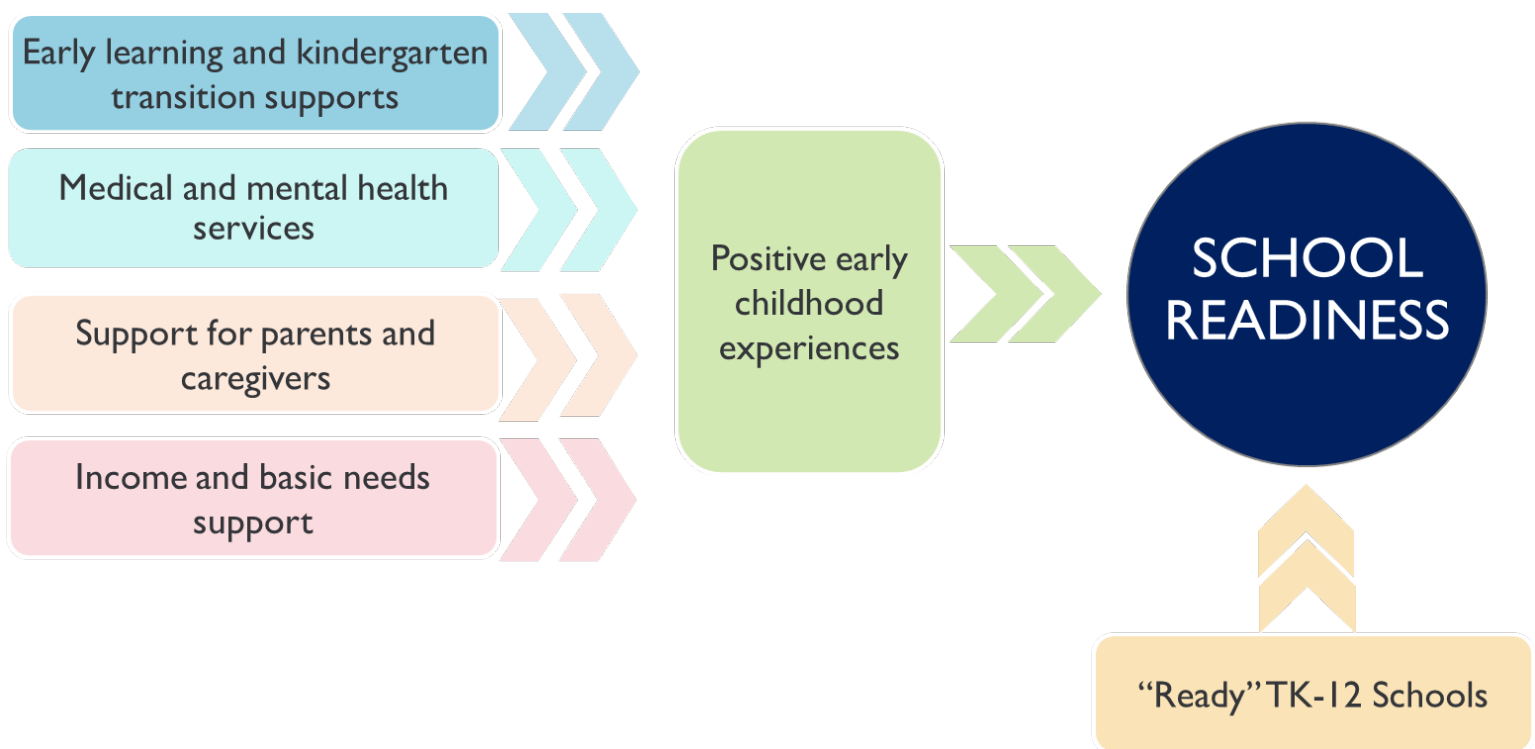
Families that are more financially secure are less stressed and have access to more resources to promote their children's readiness. The socioeconomic and racial/ethnic differences seen in readiness are primarily rooted in structural inequities like differences in access to school readiness opportunities such as high-quality ECE.<sup>iii</sup> Poverty is also related to higher rates of stress and poor health among parents/caregivers, as well as less time and disposable income, which impact other key "malleable assets" linked to readiness like screen time and bedtime. COVID-19 adversely impacted families' financial stability, and many continue to need income and basic needs supports to support their children's readiness.





## Resources to Build “Ready” TK-12 Schools

“School readiness” does not just entail the readiness of children, families, or communities, but also the readiness of TK-12 schools to meet the needs of children entering their classrooms.<sup>iv</sup> Schools need adequate resources and supports (e.g., funding, staffing, and professional development) to smooth the transition between home and school, demonstrate sensitivity to individual and cultural differences, engage in inclusive practices that meet diverse learning needs, and engage families in the education of their children.



The first five years of life have a significant impact on children’s long-term outcomes, and thus it is wise for communities to invest in young children and their families. As the community continues to experience the lingering effects of COVID-19, partnerships, policies, and programs are urgently needed to promote the health, development, well-being, and school readiness of each child in Santa Clara County.

# Introduction

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School readiness can be defined as children are healthy and ready to learn; families and communities are ready to support children's growth and development; and schools are ready to meet the needs of all children and families.<sup>v</sup> School readiness is important to measure and support considering its connection to numerous long-term outcomes for children.<sup>vi</sup>

In fall 2018, the first School Readiness Assessment (SRA) in Santa Clara County in 10 years was conducted. It involved the *Kindergarten Observation Form (KOF)*, a teacher-administered assessment of children's kindergarten readiness skills, and a survey of parents/caregivers pertaining to their child's demographics, family background, and early childhood experiences. The 2018 study found 50% of children in the county were *Fully Ready* for kindergarten. The strongest correlates to kindergarten readiness included child and family demographic factors as well as child health and well-being, formal early care and education attendance, child bedtime, child resilience, single parenthood, and housing stability.<sup>vii</sup>

Due to stay-at-home orders resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, teacher-administered assessments could not be completed as planned in 2020. Instead, a countywide kindergarten parent/caregiver survey was conducted to identify the ways in which children and families had been impacted by COVID-19. As expected, compared to 2018, a significantly greater proportion of families surveyed in 2020 reported experiencing a variety of stressors, including increased concerns about health, basic needs, and their children's well-being, and reduced access to health screenings, early intervention services, and child care.<sup>viii</sup> Across nearly all indicators, lower-income families and families of color were more likely to be adversely impacted by the pandemic.

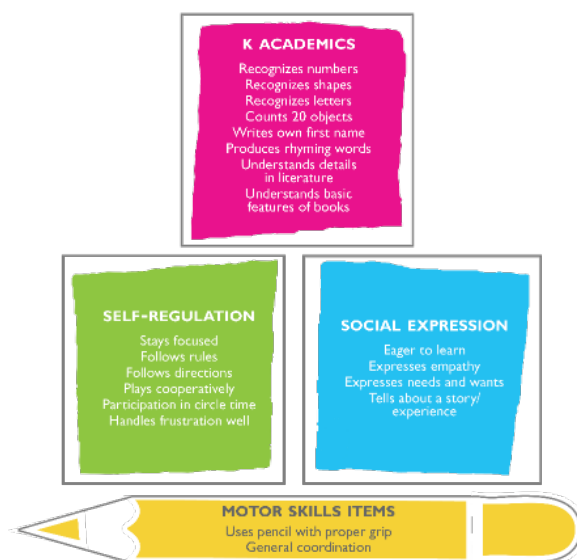
The effects of COVID-19 on children and families likely put children at risk for lower school readiness. To understand how children in Santa Clara County were impacted and how families continue to be affected by the ongoing pandemic, FIRST 5 Santa Clara County and the Santa Clara County Office of Education sponsored an SRA in fall 2021. Schools transitioned back to in-person learning in the 2021-22 school year, allowing ASR to include both the *KOF* and parent/caregiver survey in the 2021 study.

Please note that the information presented in this report describes only those students and families who participated in the assessment, who may differ in important ways from those who did not participate. However, the results provide some evidence on how COVID-19 affected the school readiness and experiences of children and families in Santa Clara County and can be used to support the community's recovery from the pandemic.



# Methodology

Kindergarten readiness was assessed by kindergarten teachers in the first few weeks of the 2021-22 school year using the *Kindergarten Observation Form (KOF)*, a reliable and valid assessment that has been shown to predict third grade academic achievement.<sup>ix</sup> This tool has been used in 18 other California counties as well as in other states. The *KOF* has 20 kindergarten readiness skills scored on a four-point scale from 1 = *Not Yet* demonstrating the skill to 4 = *Proficient* on the skill. These readiness skills comprised three *Building Blocks* – *Self-Regulation*, *Social Expression*, and *Kindergarten Academics*. A fourth area includes two items related to fine and gross motor skills, which serve as a foundation for these *Building Blocks*.



All teachers participated in a 90-minute training prior to conducting the assessment. At these trainings, ASR staff reviewed the scoring rubric and detailed scoring guide and allowed teachers to practice assigning ratings based on pictures and scenarios. These trainings and the specific skill descriptions provided in the scoring guide were designed to minimize the possibility of teacher bias.

In all, 513 kindergarten students from 21 classrooms were included in the study. In addition, 6 students were enrolled as Transitional Kindergarten (TK) students. However, TK students are not included in the overall sample described in this report, as they tend to be younger and have had different early education experiences compared to their peers in kindergarten.

The table below shows the number of classrooms and study participants represented by each school. Schools near Family Resource Centers and in Alum Rock Union School District (ARUSD) were oversampled to better evaluate the services offered through FRCs and the Universal Access Pilot Initiative. The table below indicates these schools with an asterisk (\*) and they are not included in the countywide sample. **Of the 513 kindergartners assessed, 291 students from 13 schools were selected for the countywide sample.** The sample this year is smaller than it was in 2018 when 1,253 kindergarten students from 66 classrooms participated and represents a fraction of the over 19,000 kindergarten students enrolled in Santa Clara County public schools.

Figure 4. **An Overview of Participation, by School**

District	School	Number of Classrooms	Number of Students
ARUSD	Cesar Chavez*	1	21
	Linda Vista*	3	56
	LUCHA*	2	25
	Meyer*	1	22
Campbell Union	Campbell School of Innovation	1	20
	Capri	2	36

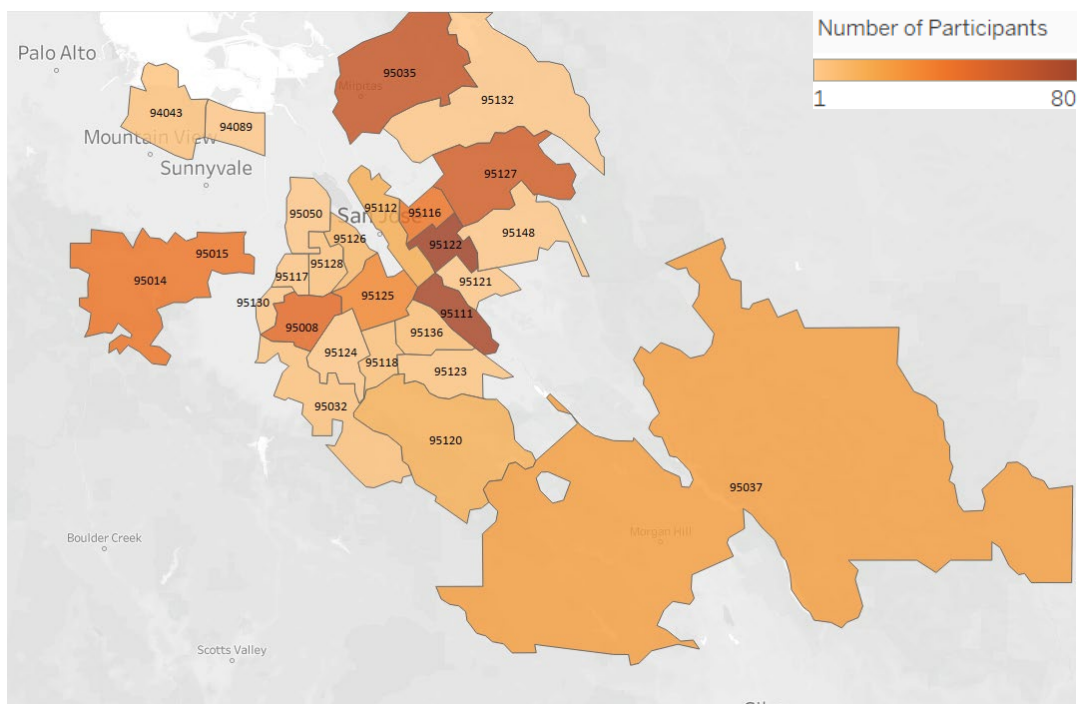
District	School	Number of Classrooms	Number of Students
Cupertino Union	Lincoln	2	29
	Sedgwick	1	14
Evergreen	Katherine Smith*	2	34
Franklin-McKinley	Dahl*	2	32
	Hellyer	1	18
	Santee*	2	29
Milpitas Unified	Alexander Rose	1	21
	Joseph Weller	2	25
	Robert Randall*	1	14
Morgan Hill Unified	P.A.Walsh STEAM Academy	1	6
Mountain View Whisman	Monta Loma	1	22
Oak Grove	STEAM@Stipe Elementary	2	29
SJUSD	Los Alamitos	1	7
	Lowell	1	11
	Willow Glen	2	42
<b>Total</b>		<b>32</b>	<b>513</b>

Source: Kindergarten Observation Form.

Note: \*ARUSD and FIRST 5 Family Resource Center oversample, not included in overall county analyses.

The map below illustrates the participation of children in the study, by Zip Code.

Figure 5. **An Overview of Participation, by Zip Code**



To better understand how family factors are related to children's levels of readiness, a *Parent Information Form (PIF)* survey is completed by parents/caregivers. The *PIF* collects a wide variety of information, including:

- Types of child care arrangements for children during the year before kindergarten entry;
- Ways in which families and children prepared for the transition to kindergarten;
- Engagement in family activities and daily routines;
- Use of parenting supports and family resources;
- Parenting social supports, attitudes, and stressors;
- Health and health care measures; and
- Several demographic and socioeconomic measures.

Care was taken to ensure that the questions could be read at a sixth grade reading level. Versions of the form were offered in English, Spanish, and Vietnamese. At the beginning of the school year, teachers distributed and then monitored collection of the parent/caregiver consent letters and *PIFs*.

Parents/caregivers were given a children's book as an incentive for their completion of the *PIF* and, to enhance their privacy, provided with envelopes to seal their completed surveys prior to returning them to their child's teacher. Among those parents/caregivers who agreed to have their child take part in the study, 76% also completed and returned the *PIF*. Readiness data on all students are included in this report, however, even if their caregiver did not complete a *PIF*.

After data were collected and cleaned, numerous statistical analyses were conducted to answer the research questions. Percentages were calculated and chi-square tests were run to test whether differences in percentages for two or more groups are likely real differences (i.e., statistically significant) or are instead due to chance. Similarly, ANOVA and independent *t*-tests were used to test whether differences in numerical values for two or more groups are likely real differences or due to chance. Regression analyses were used to estimate the strength of relationships between readiness items and various student and family characteristics. This regression method helps determine the independent contribution of each of the factors to readiness scores. Throughout this report, ASR uses the following standard abbreviations: *N* is used when noting the sample size for a chart or an analysis, and *p*-values (e.g.,  $p < .01$ ) are used to note whether certain analyses are statistically significant. *P*-values that are less than .05 are statistically significant. All significance tests were two-tailed tests (more conservative) rather than one-tailed tests (less conservative).

## A Note about How to Interpret the Data in This Report

Parents/caregivers participated in the readiness study voluntarily. This means that the information presented in this report describes only the students and families assessed, who may differ in important ways from students and families who did not participate. For example, the sample had a higher proportion of Latino/a students compared to the county as a whole. In addition, several school districts did not participate.<sup>x</sup> Statistical weights were applied to the analyses to make the sample more representative of the county, but the findings should not be extrapolated to the broader population of kindergartners in the county. Finally, the findings should also be considered in the context of limitations inherent to teacher observations, including implicit bias, and self-report, including social desirability bias (when respondents tend to make a more socially acceptable response) and reference bias, which occurs when survey responses are influenced by participants' differing reference points based on their own experience and understanding.





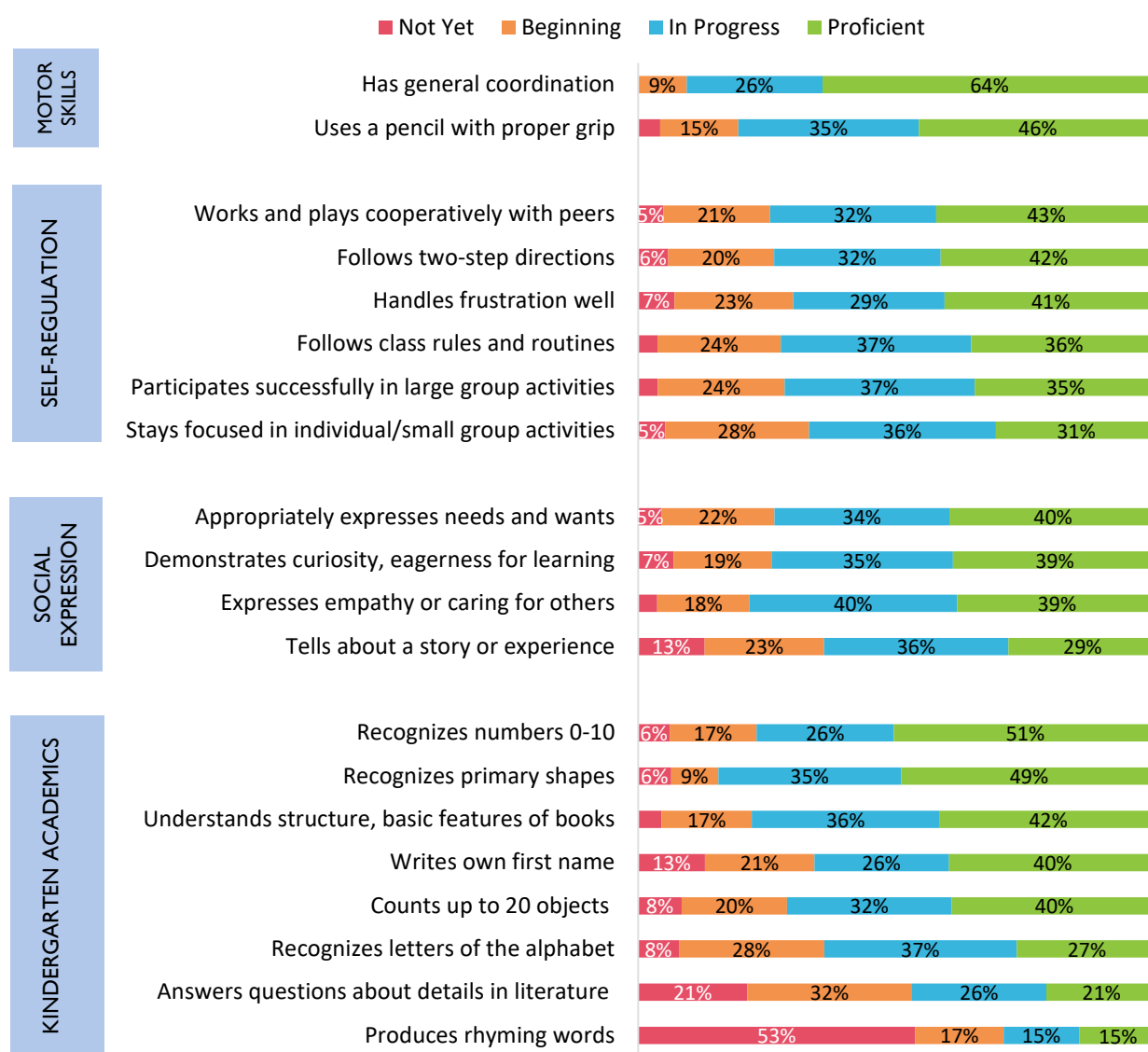
# School Readiness in Santa Clara County

This section presents information on the readiness levels of students entering kindergarten.

## Readiness Levels According to the Kindergarten Observation Form

The figure that follows illustrates the distribution of scores for each of the 20 items on the *KOF*. Students entered kindergarten strongest on gross motor skills and recognizing numbers. They were still developing their proficiency in answering questions about a story and producing rhyming words.

Figure 6. **Students' Proficiency Levels across 20 School Readiness Skills**

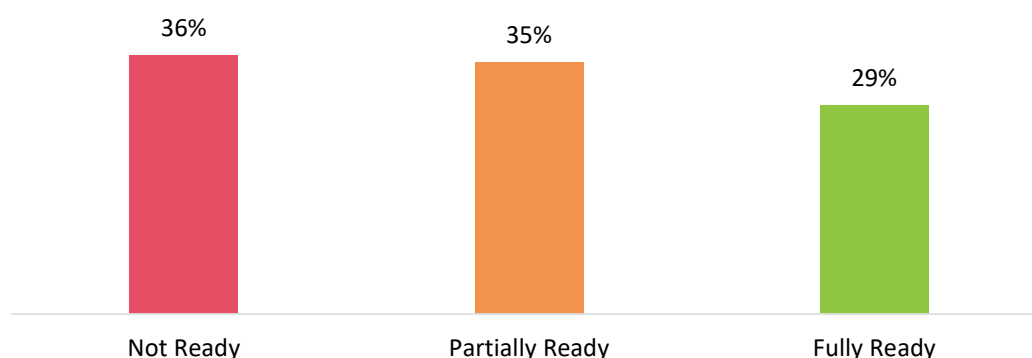


Source: Kindergarten Observation Form. N = 259-291. Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding. Proportions of less than 5% are not labeled. Scores were omitted for students for whom language barriers were a concern. Weights are applied to approximate the distributions of race/ethnicity and English Learner status of kindergartners in Santa Clara County.

## How Many Students Were Ready for Kindergarten?

Students' average scores overall and on each of the *Basic Building Blocks* dimensions were calculated (scores could range from 1 = *Not Yet* to 4 = *Proficient*). Students were considered *Fully Ready* for kindergarten in all areas if they scored at or above 3.25 out of 4 on the three *Building Blocks* – that is, if they were *Proficient* or nearing proficiency on *Self-Regulation*, *Social Expression*, and *Kindergarten Academics*. Students were considered *Partially Ready* if they were *Proficient* or nearly proficient on one or two *Building Blocks*, and considered *Not Ready* if they were still progressing in all three areas. Children who scored 3.25 or higher on the assessment in all of the three primary domains were considered *Fully Ready* and made up 29% of the Santa Clara County sample in 2021, whereas 36% of children in Santa Clara County were *Not Ready*, meaning they scored below 3.25 in all three domains. The remaining 35% of the sample was *Partially Ready*, having scored at least 3.25 in one or two of the domains.

Figure 7. **Readiness Profile**

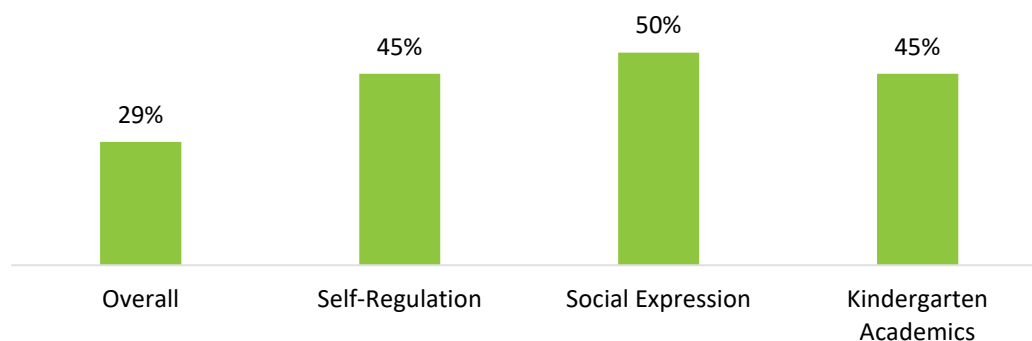


Source: Kindergarten Observation Form.

Note: N = 283 (unweighted). Sampling weights are applied to approximate the distributions of race/ethnicity and English Learner status of kindergarten students in Santa Clara County.

The percent of children ready in each domain ranged from 45% to 50%, and readiness was highest in the *Social Expression* domain.

Figure 8. **Percent Ready, by Domain**

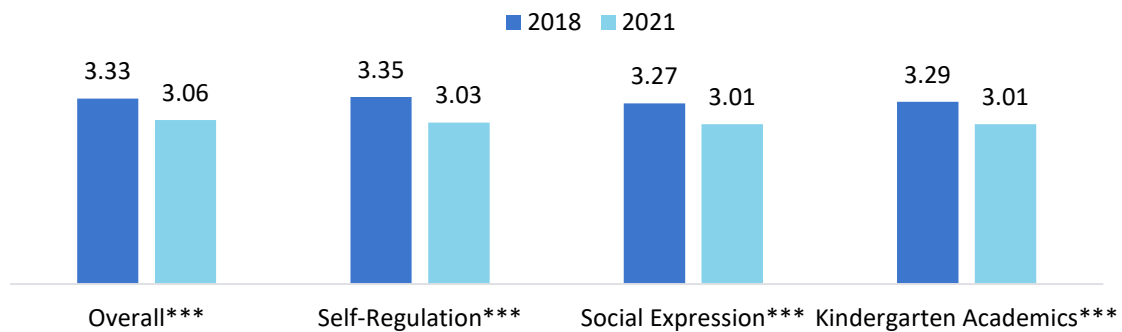


Source: Kindergarten Observation Form.

Note: N = 282-291 (unweighted). Sampling weights are applied to approximate the distributions of race/ethnicity and English Learner status of kindergarten students in Santa Clara County.

There was a significant drop in readiness between 2018 and 2021 (in 2018, 50% of children were *Fully Ready* for kindergarten). The figure that follows shows the average readiness scores overall and on each domain in each assessment year, after statistically adjusting for differences in the sample. The drop in average scores in 2021 could be attributed to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic but also to sample differences that adjustments could not fully account for.

Figure 9. **Average Readiness, by Domain and Year**



Source: Kindergarten Observation Form.

Note: N = 585-614 (2018, unweighted); N = 176-182 (2021, unweighted). Assessment not conducted in 2020. Average scores could range from 1 to 4. Sampling weights are applied to approximate the distributions of race/ethnicity and English Learner status of kindergarten students in Santa Clara County. Model controls for child race/ethnicity, gender, age, English language learner status, special needs, and family income. \*\*\*Differences are statistically significant,  $p < .001$ .

### Section Summary

- The greatest number of students were proficient in gross motor skills and recognizing numbers. They were still developing their proficiency in answering questions about a story and producing rhyming words.
- Fewer than one-third of the students (29%) had readiness profiles indicating they were *Fully Ready* across all three *Building Blocks* (i.e., scoring at least 3.25 in the *Self-Regulation*, *Social Expression*, and *Kindergarten Academics* domains). Over a third of students (36%) were *Not Ready* for school in any of the readiness domains.
- Children in the 2021 sample had lower readiness scores on all *Building Blocks* compared to children in the 2018 study.

# Child and Family Factors Associated with School Readiness

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An analysis called *multiple regression* was conducted to explore the characteristics and experiences that most strongly correlate with school readiness. The analysis examines how factors are uniquely related to readiness levels, holding constant other characteristics or experiences. However, the analyses are ultimately correlational – *not causal* – analyses. The only way to truly determine what causes increased readiness is by conducting a well-controlled experiment. It is also important to note that there are likely many other variables that could affect readiness that are beyond the scope of this assessment. Variables like temperament and style of attachment to parents/caregivers, for example, were not measured in this study, but may play an important role in children's readiness for school.

## Factors Associated with Overall Readiness

Some of the factors associated with readiness were demographic, including the child being older at the time of the assessment, being female, and identifying as White or Asian American/Pacific Islander. This latter difference between ethnic/racial groups is likely due to structural barriers and availability of community supports and resources. Thus, schools should be ready for the population of children they are receiving.

Other factors that were strongly associated with school readiness are experiences that can be modified with intervention; these include access to early learning and kindergarten transition supports, child health and well-being, access to parent/caregiver education and support, and family income and access to basic needs. These factors were linked to readiness even after taking into account other factors. For example, the correlation between child health and well-being and readiness is significant, regardless of the family's socioeconomic status.



Figure 10. **Factors Associated with School Readiness in Recent Santa Clara County Readiness Studies**

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Early learning and kindergarten transition supports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Child attended licensed <b>early care and education</b> (ECE)<sup>1</sup></li><li>• Parent/caregiver attended a <b>kindergarten orientation</b><sup>2</sup></li></ul>
Child health and well-being	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Child comes to school <b>healthy, well-rested, and well-fed</b>, and has consistent attendance, according to the child’s teacher<sup>3</sup></li><li>• Child is exposed to <b>less screen time</b> and has an <b>early bedtime</b><sup>3</sup></li><li>• Child demonstrates <b>resilience</b> (e.g., able to adjust well to changes in routine and calm themselves when upset)<sup>1</sup></li></ul>
Parent/caregiver education and support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Parent/caregiver has <b>few concerns about parenting</b> their child (i.e., “not at all” or only “a little” concerned about managing their child’s behavior)<sup>2</sup></li><li>• Parent/caregiver <b>received education or information about what to expect</b> at each developmental stage<sup>2</sup></li></ul>
Income and basic needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Family has <b>higher income</b><sup>3</sup></li><li>• Family has <b>stable housing</b> (i.e., has not experienced homelessness in the child’s lifetime)<sup>1</sup></li></ul>

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<sup>1</sup> Independently associated with readiness in 2018.

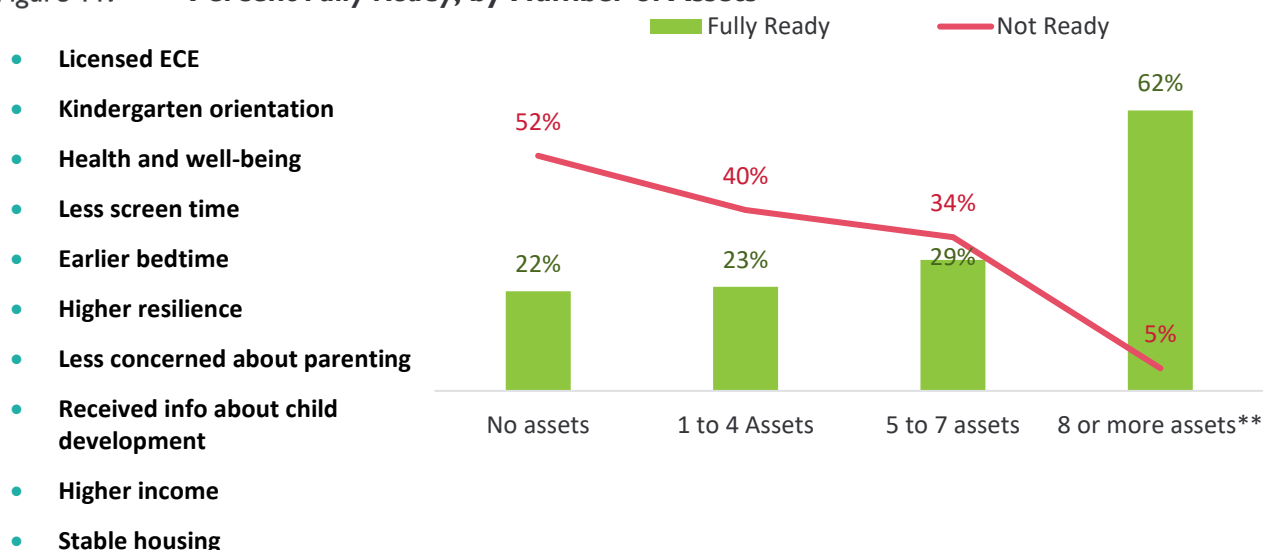
<sup>2</sup> Independently associated with readiness in 2021.

<sup>3</sup> Independently associated with readiness in 2018 and 2021.

## Cumulative Effect of Assets

There is a cumulative effect of the number of factors associated with readiness (i.e., assets) on children's readiness for kindergarten – the more assets children have, the higher their readiness. The assets included in this analysis were the factors correlated with higher readiness in one or both of the two most recent readiness studies: child attended licensed ECE, parent/caregiver attended a kindergarten orientation, child came to school without health and well-being concerns, child was exposed to less screen time, child had an earlier bedtime, child had higher resilience, parent/caregiver was less concerned about parenting, parent/caregiver received information about child development, family has a higher income, and family has stable housing. Just 22% of children in the 2021 study who had none of these assets were *Fully Ready*, while almost two-thirds (62%) of children with eight or more assets were *Fully Ready* in all domains.

Figure 11. **Percent Fully Ready, by Number of Assets**



Source: Kindergarten Observation Form, Parent Information Form.

Note: N = 283 (unweighted). Sampling weights were applied to approximate the distributions of race/ethnicity and English Learner status of kindergarten students in Santa Clara County. \*\*Differences are statistically significant,  $p < .01$ .

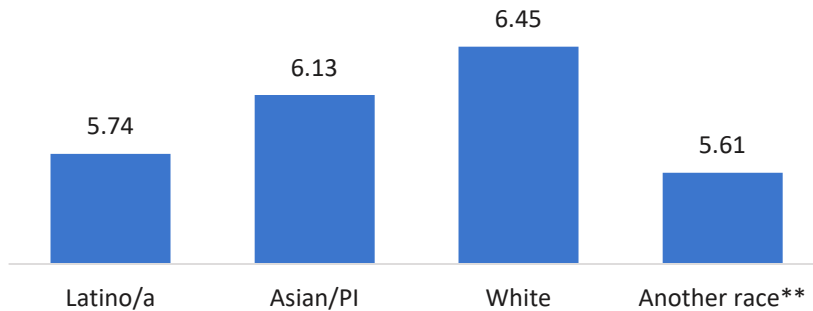
## Racial/Ethnic Differences in Readiness

Readiness also differed by children's race/ethnicity, with Latino/a children demonstrating lower readiness on average compared to that of White and Asian American/Pacific Islander children. These differences are likely due to structural barriers and availability of community supports and resources.

Indeed, as shown in the chart that follows, Latino/a children also had fewer assets than White and Asian American children, which may partly account for the readiness differences observed.



Figure 12. **Average Number of Assets, by Race/Ethnicity**



Source: Kindergarten Observation Form, Parent Information Form.

Note: N = 152 (unweighted). Sampling weights were applied to approximate the distributions of race/ethnicity and English Learner status of kindergarten students in Santa Clara County. \*\*Differences are statistically significant,  $p < .01$ .

### Structural Inequities and Readiness

Structural inequities underlie many of the disparities seen in school readiness.<sup>xi</sup> For example, with more limited access to resources, supports, and enrichment opportunities like ECE, Latino/a children and children from lower-income families entered kindergarten with lower readiness levels compared to White children and children in more affluent families. Poverty is also related to higher rates of stress and poor health among parents/caregivers, as well as less time to spend with their child and less disposable income to cover basic needs and health and enrichment supports, which then impact other key assets associated with readiness like screen time and bedtime. Closing the readiness gap will require interventions that ultimately address the policies and systems that produce and reproduce the unequal conditions that lead to readiness inequities. At the same time, schools should be aware of these differences and be prepared to address readiness gaps for the diverse populations they are serving.

### Section Summary

- In the last two Santa Clara County school readiness assessments, child demographics and the following assets were most strongly associated with children's readiness for school:
  - Early learning and kindergarten transition supports – children attend licensed ECE and families have access to kindergarten orientations
  - Child health and well-being – children are healthy, resilient, and have healthy home routines like an early bedtime and limited screen time
  - Parent education and support – parents/caregivers are confident in their ability to care for their children and receive information about what to expect in their child's development
  - Income and basic needs – families are financially secure and have stable housing
- The presence of a greater number of assets, like being healthy and having less screen time, significantly improved the likelihood that children came to school *Fully Ready*.

- Readiness was lower for Latino/a children than those who are White or Asian American/Pacific Islander, which can be accounted for by the fact that Latino/a children also had fewer access points to assets and resources.
- Structural inequities are at the root of the readiness gaps observed based on characteristics like child race/ethnicity and family income. Schools should be aware of these differences and be prepared to address readiness gaps for the diverse populations they are serving.
- Closing the readiness gap will require interventions that ultimately address the policies and systems that produce and reproduce the unequal conditions that lead to readiness inequities



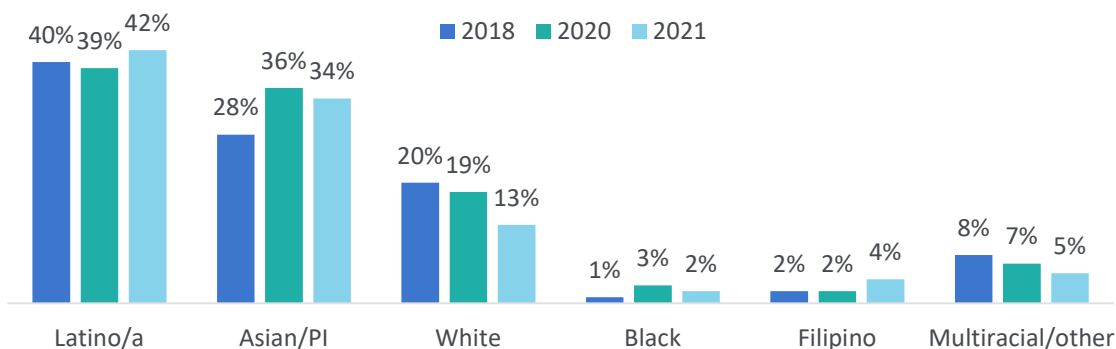
# Demographic and Socioeconomic Characteristics of Students and Families in the Study

The remainder of this report illustrates the characteristics and experiences of children and families in the study. This section describes the demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of students and families.

## Age, Gender, and Race/Ethnicity

In the current study, children were 5.4 years old on average, with an equal distribution of males and females. About 42% of the weighted sample was Latino/a, and over a third of the sample was Asian American/Pacific Islander (34%). Only 13% of the sample was White, and the rest of the sample was Filipino (4%), Black (2%), or multiracial or another race/ethnicity (2%).<sup>xii</sup> Relative to the samples in previous studies, there were more Latino/a children in the current study.

Figure 13. Students’ Race/Ethnicity

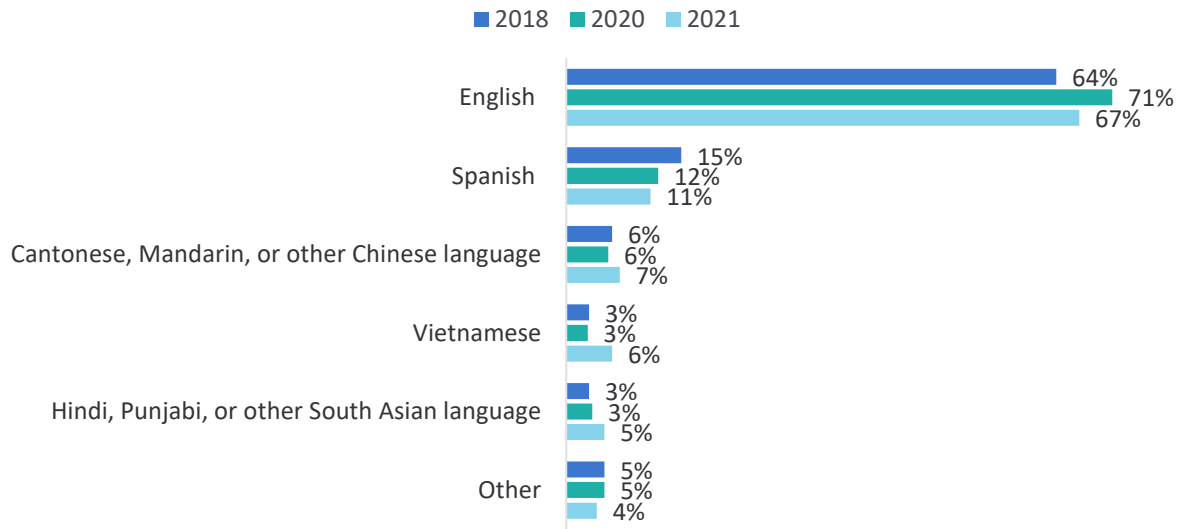


Source: Kindergarten Observation Form, Parent Information Form.  
Note: N = 872 (2018); N = 337 (2020); N = 274 (2021). Sampling weights were applied to approximate the distributions of race/ethnicity and English Learner status of kindergarten students in Santa Clara County.

## Primary Home Language

Close to one in five (19%) children were English Learners.<sup>xiii</sup> Most children primarily heard English at home (67%), while about 11% of children heard Spanish most often at home. Compared to prior years, fewer children in 2021 heard Spanish at home, while a greater proportion heard Chinese, Vietnamese, or a South Asian language.

Figure 14. **Home Languages**



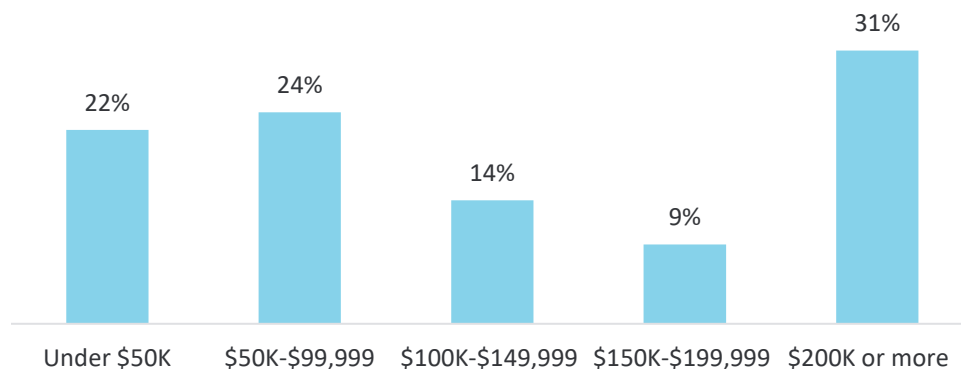
Source: Parent Information Form.

Note: N = 681 (2018); N = 296 (2020); N = 203 (2021). Sampling weights were applied to approximate the distributions of race/ethnicity and English Learner status of kindergarten students in Santa Clara County.

## Family Income

When asked about their current family income, almost half (46%) of parents/caregivers reported earning less than \$100,000 per year, about a quarter (23%) earned between \$100,000 and \$200,000 per year, and almost a third (31%) earned at least \$200,000 per year. Income was asked differently on prior surveys, but approximately 32% of families in 2018, and 20% of families in 2020 earned less than \$50,000 per year, compared to 22% in 2021. For context, the median income in Santa Clara County for families is approximately \$151,620 per year.<sup>xiv</sup>

Figure 15. **Family Income**



Source: Parent Information Form.

Note: N = 288. Sampling weights were applied to approximate the distributions of race/ethnicity and English Learner status of kindergarten students in Santa Clara County.

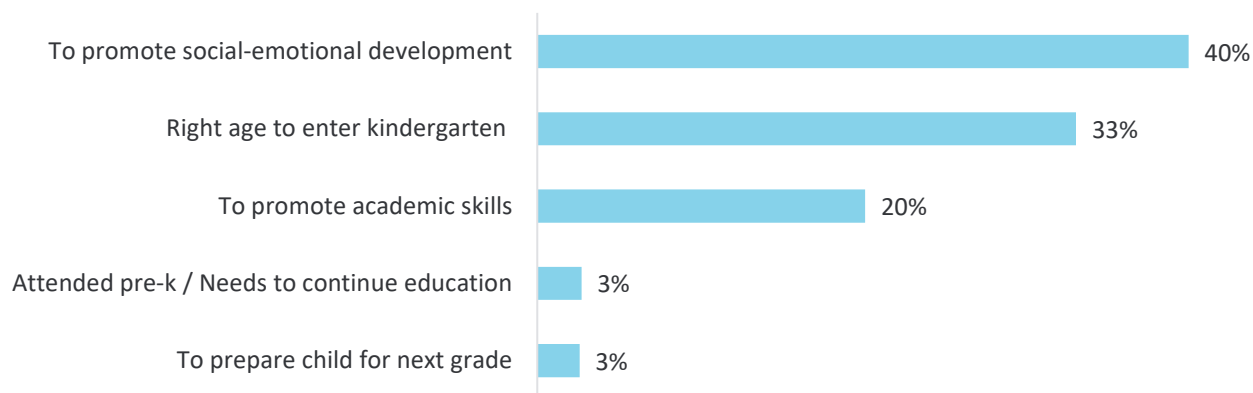
## Why Families Enrolled Child in Kindergarten or Transitional Kindergarten

Close to 200 parents/caregivers indicated the reasons why they enrolled their child in kindergarten or Transitional Kindergarten (TK). A few themes emerged; the most commonly provided reasons included the desire to promote their child's **social-emotional development** and their **child being the right age to enter kindergarten**.

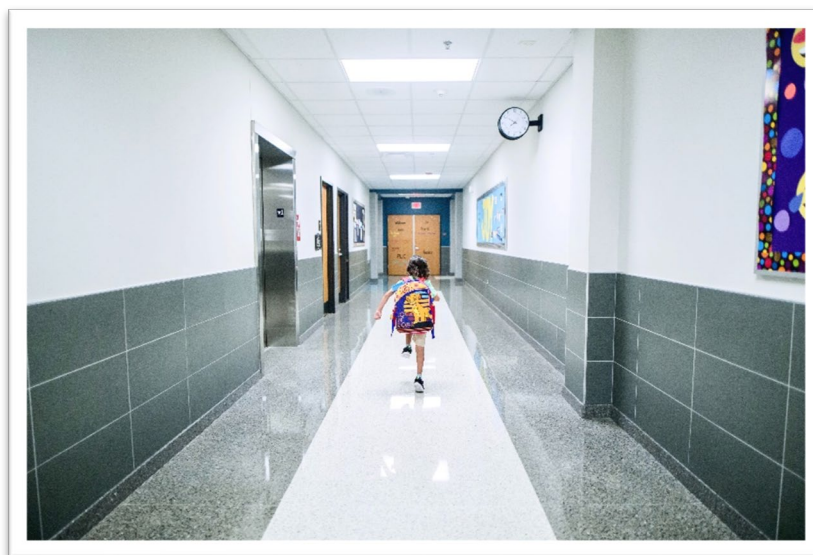
*"Our family wants our child to go to school to gain more knowledge, network/engage with teacher and friends."*

- Parent/caregiver of a Santa Clara County kindergarten student

Figure 16. **Top Reasons Parents/Caregivers Enrolled Their Child in Kindergarten/TK**



Source: Parent Information Form.  
Note: N = 190.



# Family Stressors

This section describes stressors families may have experienced, including how COVID-19 affected them. Where possible, comparisons are made to prior years.

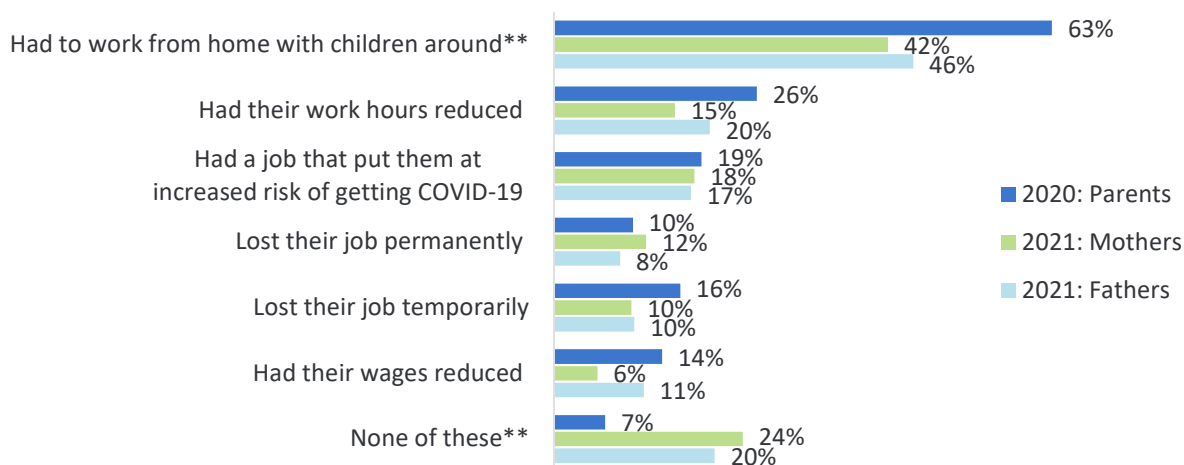
## Impact of COVID-19 on Family Income and Employment

In both 2020 and 2021, parents/caregivers indicated how COVID-19 had affected their employment and income. Generally, the effects of the pandemic linger but are subsiding, with about 80% of caregivers reporting an impact on their income or employment in 2021, down from the 93% who reported an impact in 2020. The most common effect remains having to work from home with children around, but this declined from 63% of parents/caregivers reporting this issue in 2020 to about 40% of parents/caregivers in 2021. This aligns with national polling showing fewer people are working from home now than in 2020.<sup>xv</sup>

Likewise, fewer families this year reported temporary job loss, in line with improving state and local unemployment trends.<sup>xvi</sup> Despite improved trends, however, statewide rates of job loss were higher among low-income and Black and Latino/a caregivers during the pandemic.<sup>xvii</sup> Similarly, the 2021 study also showed higher rates of job loss or hour or wage reductions among Latino/a caregivers and caregivers from lower-income households. Lower-income and Latino/a families were also more likely to report that they had a job that put them at increased risk of getting COVID-19.

In 2021, parents/caregivers were also asked to indicate which family members experienced these employment effects, given that women were more likely to reduce their work hours or quit their job during the pandemic to care for children.<sup>xviii</sup> However, no significant differences in employment or income effects between mothers and fathers were observed. This may be because other research has shown a recovery in employment for mothers in 2021; according to the U.S. Census, the employment of mothers has all but caught up to fathers in terms of pre-pandemic patterns.<sup>xix</sup>

Figure 17. **Impact of COVID-19 on Family Income and Employment**



Source: Parent Information Form.

Note: N = 298 (2020); N = 163-167 (2021). Percentages sum to more than 100 because more than one category could be selected. Question not asked in 2018. Question was not separated to mother/father in 2020. \*\*Differences are statistically significant,  $p < .01$ .

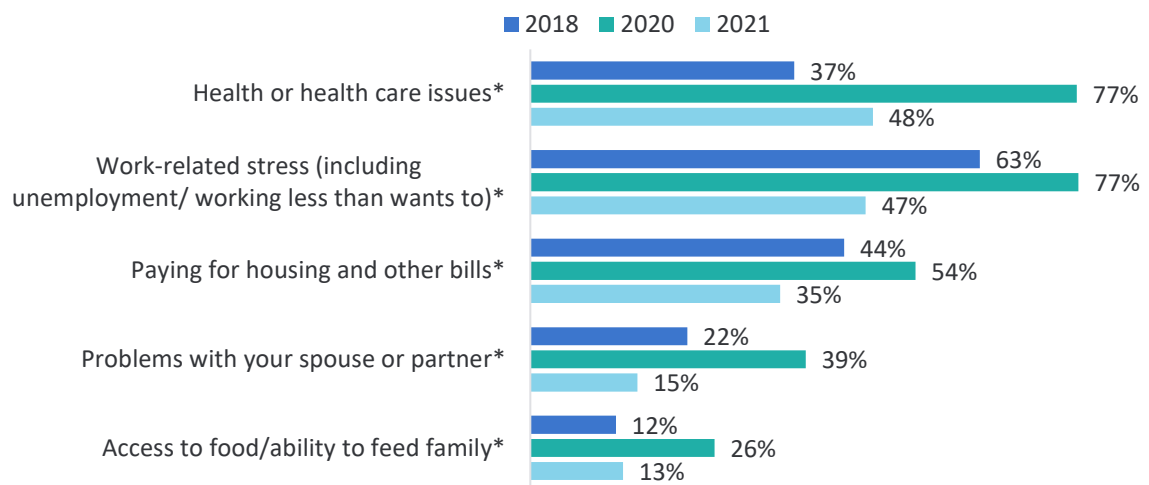


## Family Concerns

Parents/caregivers also indicated the degree to which they were worried about various types of family concerns. The greatest concerns for parents/caregivers in 2021 were related to health and employment, followed by paying bills, problems with one's spouse or partner, and access to food. The level of concern parents/caregivers reported for most issues generally returned to pre-pandemic levels, except for concern about health and health care issues. National research has shown caregiver stress levels dropped somewhat in 2021 from where they were at the height of the pandemic, but they remain high.<sup>xx</sup>

Parents/caregivers reported **fewer family, health, employment, and basic needs concerns in 2021 than in 2020**, but concerns about health remain above pre-pandemic levels.

Figure 18. **Percent of Parents/Caregivers Reporting Family, Health, Employment, and Basic Needs Concerns**



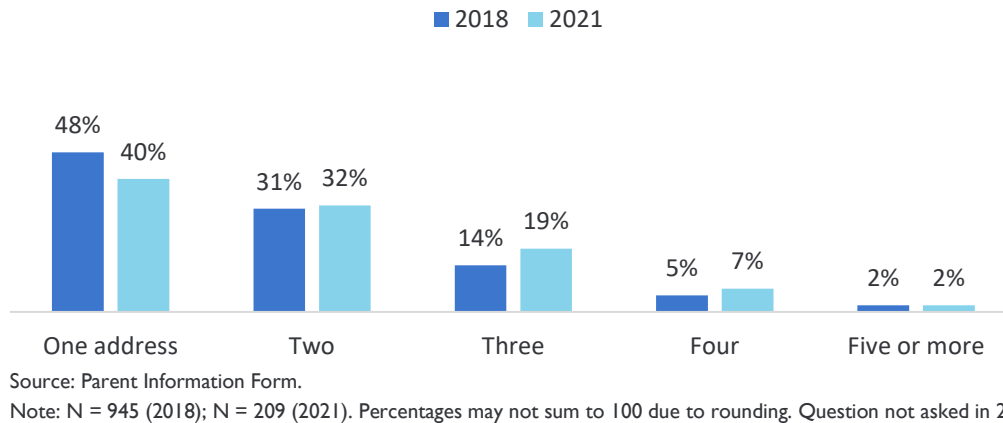
Source: Parent Information Form.

Note: N = 916-927 (2018); N = 303-307 (2020); N = 213-216 (2021). Numbers reflect percent of respondents who marked "a little," "moderately," or "very" concerned; proportion who marked "not at all" not shown. \*Differences are statistically significant,  $p < .05$ .

## Housing Insecurity

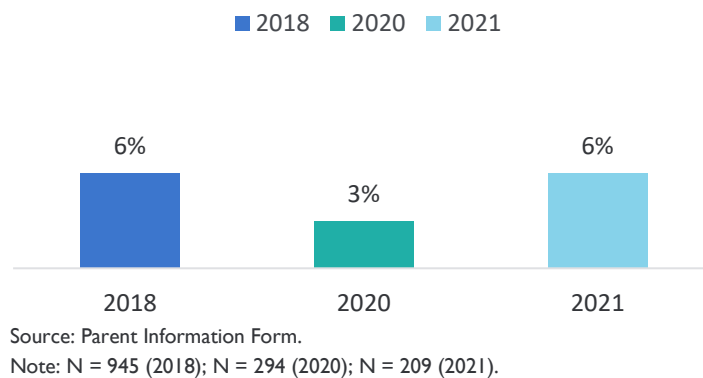
Residential mobility was common, with over half of families having lived at more than one address since the child was born. Due to the high cost of living in California, housing instability was a concern for many families even before the onset of COVID-19,<sup>xxi</sup> and the pandemic has particularly impacted the housing stability of families of color and lower-income families.<sup>xxii</sup>

Figure 19. **Number of Addresses Since Child's Birth**



In 2021, 6% of parents/caregivers said they had experienced homelessness at some point in their child's life (including staying in a public place, shelter, hotel, or with friends or family due to economic hardship) – double the rate of homelessness the year before (3%), and the same rate observed in 2018. However, other research suggests homelessness increased during the pandemic as families struggled to make ends meet.<sup>xxiii</sup>

Figure 20. **Homelessness, Including Living in a Shelter or Shared Housing Due to Economic Hardship**



### Section Summary

- About 80% of parents/caregivers in 2021 said COVID-19 impacted their income or employment, down from 93% in 2020.
- Latino/a caregivers and those from lower income households were more likely to report job loss, income changes, and having a job that put them at risk of getting COVID-19.
- Parents/caregivers reported fewer family, health, employment, and basic needs concerns in 2021 than in 2020, but concerns about health remain above pre-pandemic levels.
- Rates of residential mobility and homelessness were similar in 2018 and 2021.

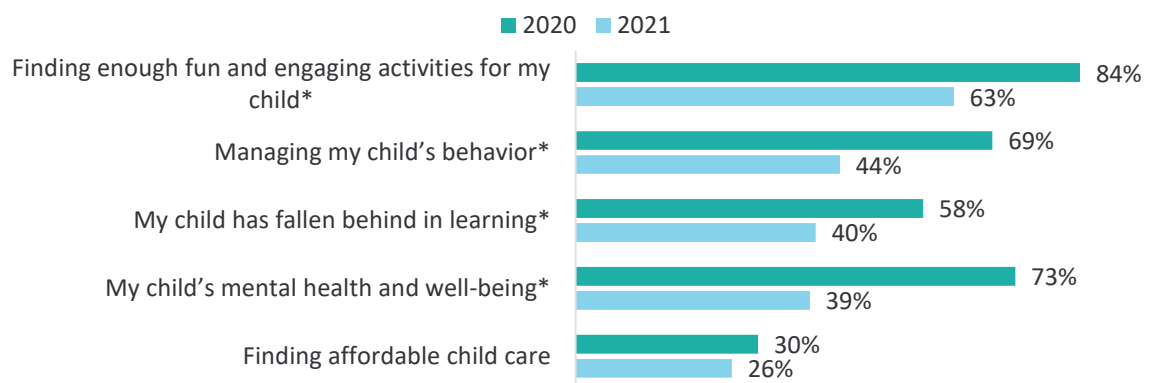
# Parenting and Family Activities and Routines

This section summarizes data from the parent/caregiver survey on parent/caregiver concerns about their children, parenting efficacy, and use of services and resources, as well as family routines and activities, including activities to prepare for kindergarten.

## Parent/Caregiver Concerns about Child

Parents/caregivers tended to be less concerned about their children in 2021 than they were in 2020. Although concern rates dropped, the majority of parents/caregivers (63%) were worried about keeping their child engaged and managing their child behavior. In addition, over one-third of parents/caregivers were concerned about managing their child's behavior (44%), that their child had fallen behind in learning (40%), and about their child's mental health (39%). Similar to what was found in 2020, fewer families (26%) were concerned about finding affordable child care. A survey of California parents/caregivers found that 65% reported at least some concerns about their child's mental health or that their child had fallen behind in learning,<sup>xxiv</sup> while a national study of young children showed child well-being has remained low throughout the pandemic.<sup>xxv</sup>

Figure 21. **Percent of Parents/Caregivers Reporting Concerns about Their Child**



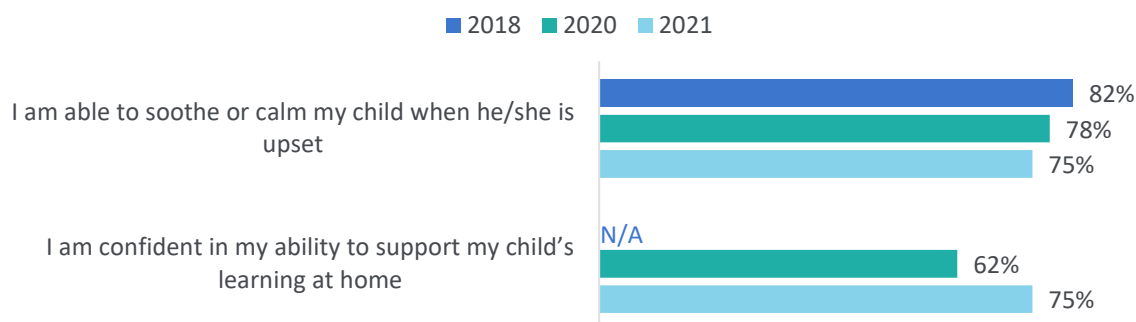
Source: Parent Information Form.

Note: N = 304-306 (2020); N = 213-216 (2021). Question not asked in 2018. Numbers reflect percent of respondents who marked "a little," "moderately," or "very" concerned; proportion who marked "not at all" not shown. \*Differences are statistically significant,  $p < .05$ .

## Parenting Efficacy

The parent/caregiver survey included a set of questions to assess parenting self-efficacy. Across the years, most parents (at least 75%) reported that they are able to soothe or calm their child. Parents/caregivers were also confident in their ability to support their child's learning at home, and this confidence increased in 2021, perhaps because families gained more experience as they supported their children's remote learning through the pandemic.

Figure 22. **Percent of Parents/Caregivers Reporting High Parenting Efficacy**



Source: Parent Information Form.

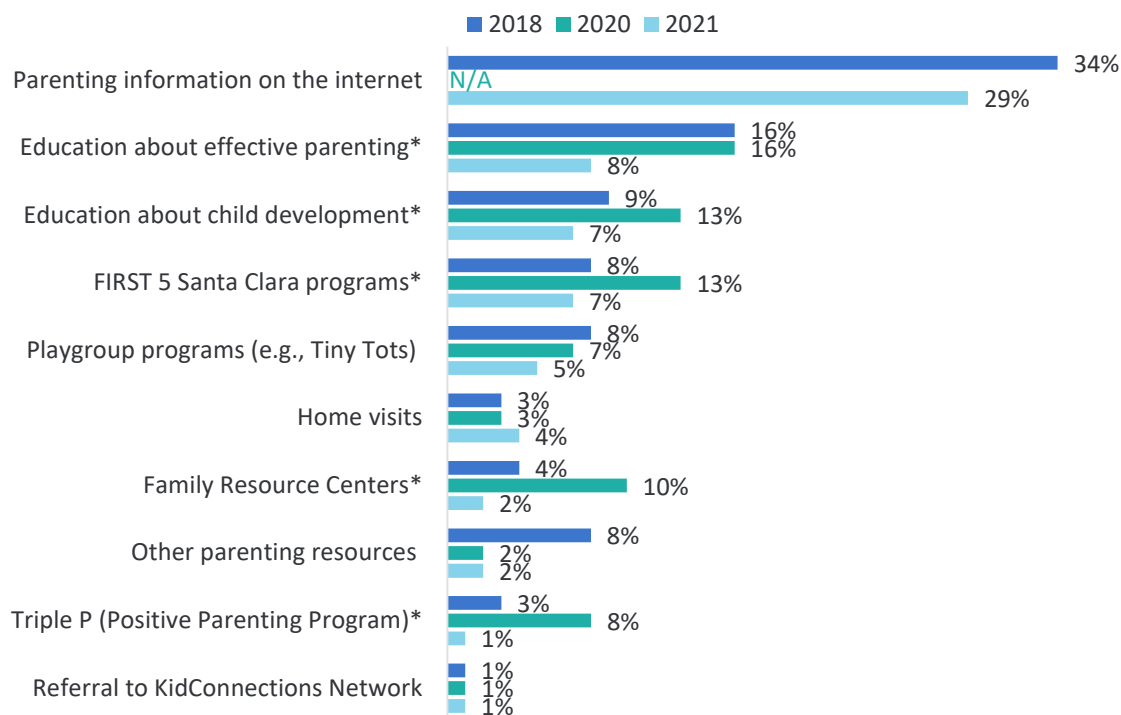
Note: N = 926-945 (2018); N = 303 (2020); N = 211-212 (2021). N/A: Question not asked in 2018. Reflects proportion who marked "often" or "almost always"; proportion who marked "rarely" or "sometimes" not shown.

### **Use of Parenting Programs, Services, and Supports**

Parents/caregivers were also surveyed about their use of a variety of parent/caregiver programs and services. Between 2020 and 2021, there was a decline in the use of several types of parenting services including parent education and Family Resource Centers (FRCs), but utilization rates in 2021 were similar to those seen in 2018. In 2021, many parents/caregivers (34%) reported relying on the internet to get parenting information. Relative to higher-income families, more lower-income families did not receive any type of service. Latino/a families were also less likely to look for parenting information on the internet, compared to families of other races/ethnicities.



Figure 23. **Percent of Families Using Parenting Programs, Services, and Supports**



Source: Parent Information Form.

Note: N = 890 (2018); N = 298 (2020); N = 207 (2021). In 2020 “Parenting information on the internet” was not asked.

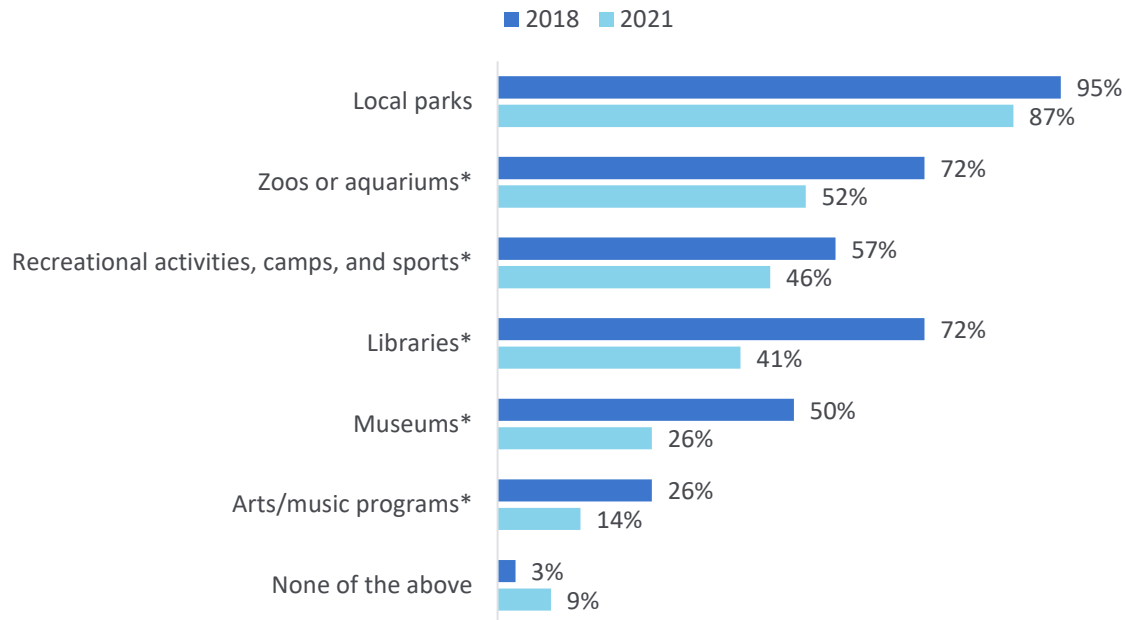
\*Differences are statistically significant,  $p < .05$ .

## Use of Local Family Resources

Parents/caregivers indicated whether they had ever used the local family resources listed on the parent/caregiver survey, including local parks; libraries; recreational activities, camps, and sports; local museums; zoos; and arts/music programs. The use of family resources has significantly dropped since 2018, likely due to closure of most resources during the pandemic. However, local parks remained open, and this was the most widely used resource (reported by 87% of families). Additionally, higher-income households were more likely to use museums and libraries than lower-income households, and Latino/a families were less likely to use libraries than families of other races/ethnicities.

Parents’/caregivers’ use of resources like libraries, museums, and zoos, dropped between 2018 and 2021, likely due to COVID-related closures of these facilities

Figure 24. **Percent of Families Using Local Resources**



Source: Parent Information Form.

Note: N = 947 (2018); N = 213 (2021). Percentages sum to more than 100 because more than one resource could be selected.

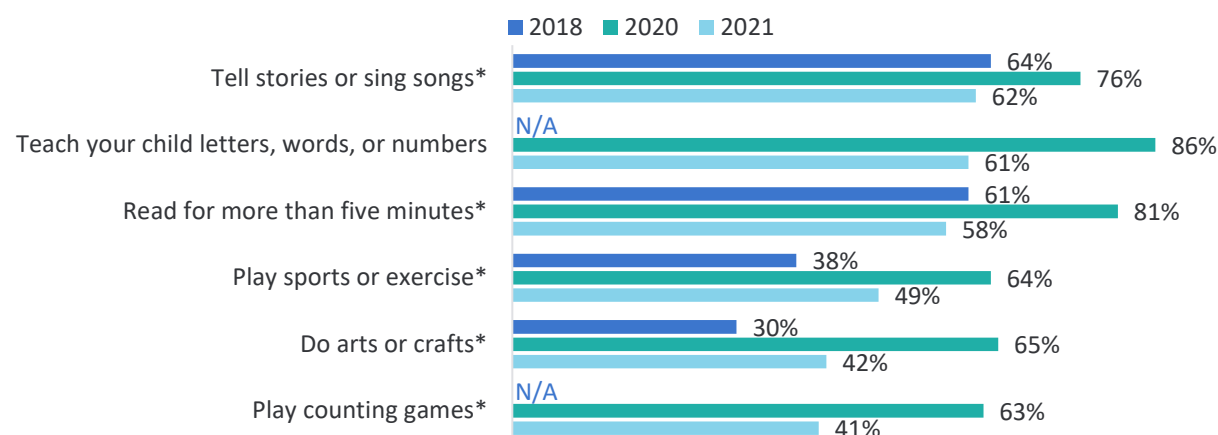
Question not asked in 2020. \*Differences are statistically significant,  $p < .05$ .

## Family Activity Engagement

To better understand family routines and activities, the survey asked parents/caregivers to report how often they spent time doing a variety of activities with their child during a typical week, including reading, telling stories or singing songs, and playing sports or exercising. As shown below, families were significantly less likely to report participating in these activities at least five days per week in 2021 than they were in 2020, but participation rates were similar to or higher than those observed in 2018. Parents/caregivers from higher-income households read to their children more frequently than parents/caregivers from lower-income households, and White families read to their children and played sports with their children more frequently than families of other racial/ethnic backgrounds.



Figure 25. **Percent Engaging in Family Activities At Least 5 Days per Week**



Source: Parent Information Form.

Note: N = 871-915 (2018); N = 303-305 (2020); N = 197-207 (2021). Numbers reflect percent of respondents who engaged in family activities at least 5 days per week. N/A: Question not asked in 2018. \*Differences between 2021 and 2020 are statistically significant,  $p < .05$ .

## Family Routines

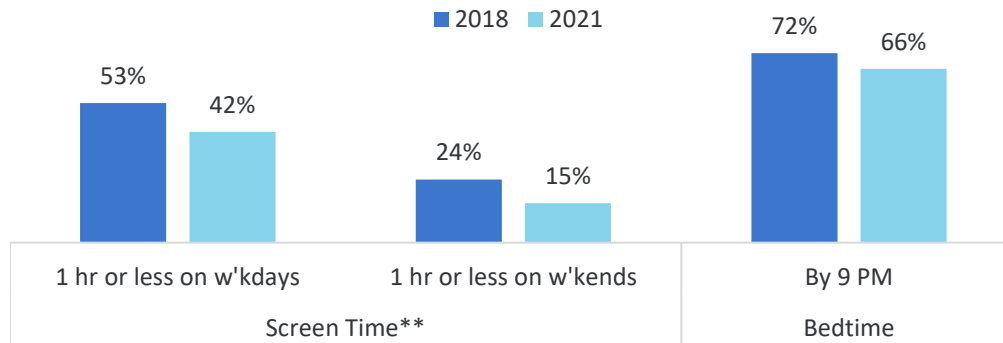
The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP, 2016) recommends that young children aged 2-5 get no more than one hour of “screen time” per day, which includes time spent watching television or videos or playing video or computer games. During the pandemic, the closure of schools and recreational facilities and encouragement of social distancing made families increasingly reliant on digital media and screen time increased.<sup>xxvi</sup> As a result, some researchers argue these AAP guidelines should be revised to consider the quality of the content viewed during screen time.<sup>xxvii</sup> Indeed, this study found the average amount of screen time children had increased between 2018 and 2021. The majority of children in the 2021 study were spending more than the recommended one hour per day on screen time activities during weekdays (58%) and on the weekends (85%).

The COVID-19 pandemic also disrupted children’s daily routines, including bedtime, resulting in many children going to bed later than they had before the pandemic.<sup>xxviii</sup> About two-thirds (66%) of children went to bed by 9:00 PM in 2021, compared to 72% who went to bed by 9:00 PM in 2018.

There were significant correlations between screen time and bedtime – bedtimes were later among children who were exposed to more screen time. Also, both indicators were related to income and race/ethnicity. Specifically, children in higher-income families and White children were more likely to go to bed earlier and be exposed to less screen time relative to other children.



Figure 26. **Screen Time and Bedtimes**



Source: Parent Information Form.

Note: N = 931 (2018); N = 195-217 (2021). Question not asked in 2020. \*\*Differences are statistically significant,  $p < .01$ .

### Families' Exposure to Kindergarten Information and Opportunities

Parents/caregivers in the study indicated whether or not they had received various types of information to prepare themselves and their children for kindergarten. Over three-quarters of parents/caregivers received information about the immunizations needed for kindergarten and kindergarten registration, and over half received information about school readiness skills and how ready their child was for school. The closure of schools and child care sites meant many families had less access to this kind of information during the pandemic. Indeed, fewer parents/caregivers in 2021 as compared to those who participated in 2018 received information about school readiness skills and how ready their child was for school. Parents/caregivers from higher-income households were more likely to have received this information than parents/caregivers from lower-income households.

Families were **less likely to receive school readiness information and participate in kindergarten transition activities** in 2021 than they were in 2018

Figure 27. **Receipt of Information Related to Kindergarten Transition**

	2018	2021
Information about the immunizations needed for kindergarten and how to get them for your child	N/A	85%
Information about how and when to register child for school	81%	79%
General information about the skills all children need for kindergarten*	75%	64%
Specific information about how you could help your child develop skills to be ready for kindergarten*	71%	55%
Specific information about how ready your child was for kindergarten*	66%	53%

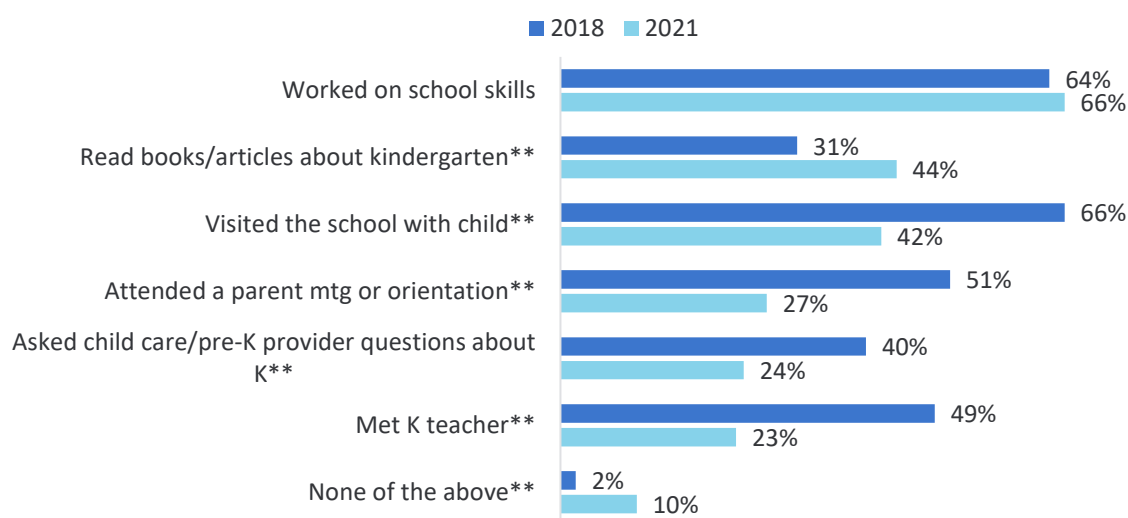
Source: Parent Information Form.

Note: N = 960-967 (2018); N = 216 (2021). Question not asked in 2020. \*Differences are statistically significant,  $p < .05$ .

## Families' Engagement in Transition Activities

Parents/caregivers were also asked to report on kindergarten transition activities they had engaged in prior to the start of school. Two-thirds of parents/caregivers had worked on school skills with their child, and just under half had read books about kindergarten (44%) and visited the school with the child (42%). About a quarter of parents/caregivers had attended a parent/caregiver meeting or orientation (27%), asked a child care provider questions about kindergarten (24%), and met the kindergarten teacher with the child (23%). With the exception of activities caregivers can do at home, engagement in kindergarten transition activities dropped significantly in 2021 likely because of COVID-related ECE site and school closures.

Figure 28. **Percent of Families Engaging in Transition Activities**



Source: Parent Information Form.

Note: N = 969 (2018); N = 217 (2021). Question not asked in 2020. \*Differences are statistically significant,  $p < .05$ .

### Section Summary

- Parents/caregivers had fewer concerns about their children in 2021 than in 2020, but most continue to be worried about keeping their child engaged.
- Parenting efficacy was high and parent/caregiver confidence in their ability to support their child's learning at home increased from 2020 to 2021.
- Between 2020 and 2021, there was a decline in the use of several types of parenting services, but utilization rates in 2021 were similar to those seen in 2018.
- Parents'/caregivers' use of resources like libraries, museums, and zoos, dropped between 2018 and 2021.

- Engagement in family activities was lower in 2021 than it was in 2020, but engagement levels were similar to or higher than those observed in 2018.
- Children's bedtimes were relatively unchanged between 2018 and 2020, but their exposure to screen time increased over this period.
- Families were less likely to receive school readiness information and participate in kindergarten transition activities in 2021 than they were in 2018.



# Child Health, Development, Well-Being

Readiness for kindergarten is strongly associated with children’s early health, development, and learning experiences. This section discusses children’s access to health care, early intervention, and early care and education.

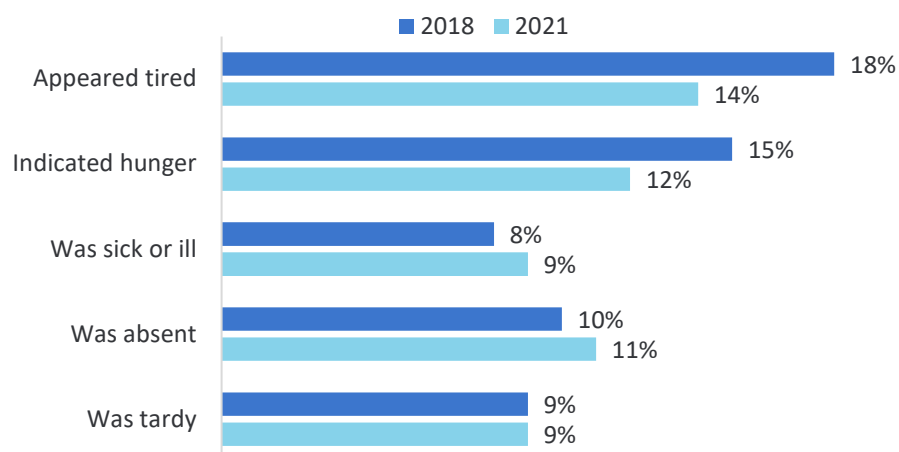
## Well-Being and Attendance Concerns

Teachers indicated the extent to which children demonstrated health and well-being and attendance concerns in the first few weeks of school. Although COVID-19 disrupted the sleep of many children,<sup>xxx</sup> many children fell ill from the virus,<sup>xxx</sup> and child food insecurity rates increased in Santa Clara County from 7% in 2019 to a projected 10% in 2021,<sup>xxxi</sup> teachers’ concerns about child health and well-being did not significantly change between 2018 and 2021. Approximately 14% of children appeared tired, 12% exhibited hunger, and 9% appeared ill on at least some days. Teachers reported that Asian American/Pacific Islander children experienced fewer well-being concerns compared to children of other races/ethnicities. Children from higher-income households were also less likely to experience hunger and tiredness on at least some days.



Eleven percent of children in the sample were absent on at least some days, while 9% were tardy frequently. Although statewide data is not available yet, some California school districts have reported an increase in absenteeism in 2021-22 relative to pre-pandemic levels,<sup>xxxii</sup> but we did not observe a significant change in teacher reports of absenteeism in our study.

Figure 29. Well-Being and Attendance Concerns



Source: Kindergarten Observation Form.

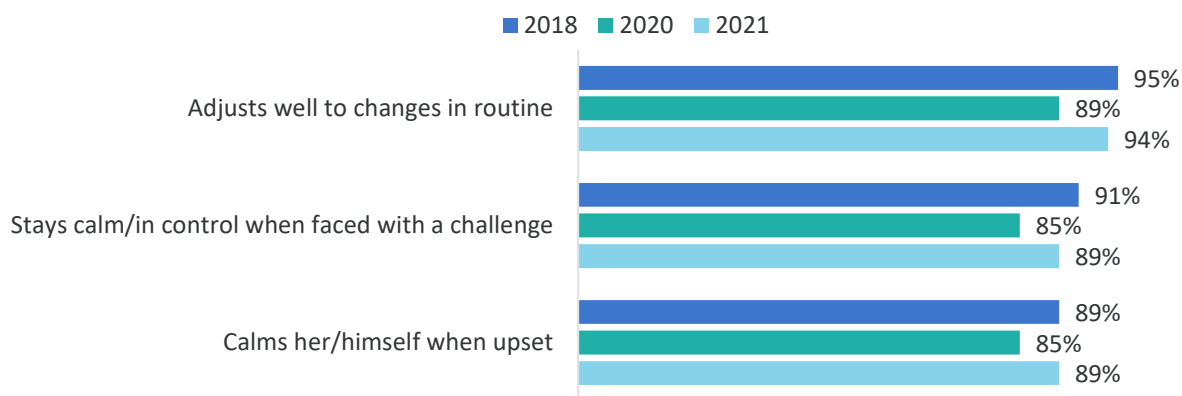
Note: N = 1,229-1,230 (2018); N = 249-288 (2021). Question not asked in 2020. Reflects proportion who marked “on some days,” “on most days,” or “just about every day.”

## Child Resilience

Child resilience (i.e., the child adjusts well to changes in routine, can calm her/himself when upset, and stays calm and in control when faced with a challenge) has been consistently high over the years. In 2020, resilience levels went slightly down, but in 2021, they returned to the levels observed in 2018.

**27%** of parents/caregivers said they delayed getting medical care for their child during COVID-19

Figure 30. **Parents'/Caregivers' Perceptions of Child Resilience**



Source: Parent Information Form.

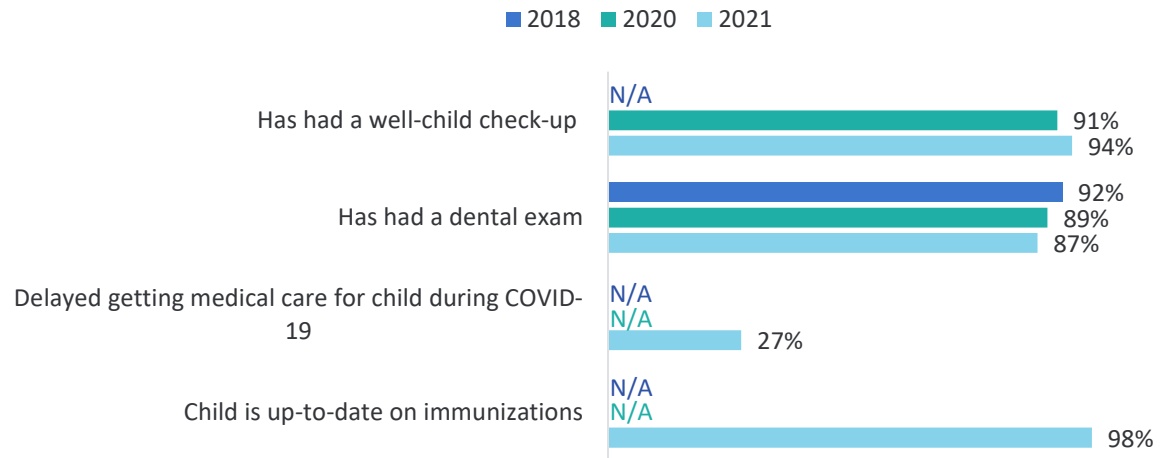
Note: N = 945-947 (2018); N = 302-305 (2020); N = 214-215 (2021). Reflects proportion who marked the statement is "somewhat true" or "very true" of their child; proportion who marked "not true" not shown.

## Health Care Access

Across the study years, most children had received a dental exam (87%-92%) and a well-child check-up (91%-94%). In the 2021 survey, the *PIF* asked if parents/caregivers delayed getting medical care for their child due to the pandemic; a delay in care was reported by 27% of parents/caregivers. This rate is similar to the 29% of California caregivers who reported on a statewide survey they experienced a cancellation of medical or dental appointments during COVID-19.<sup>xxxiii</sup> On that statewide survey and in this current study, rates of missed or delayed medical care were higher among White children than children of other races/ethnicities.

The California Department of Public Health reported a decline in immunizations in 2020,<sup>xxxiv</sup> but this study found that 98% of children were up-to-date on their immunizations (this question was not asked in earlier years).

Figure 31. **Children’s Use of Health Care**



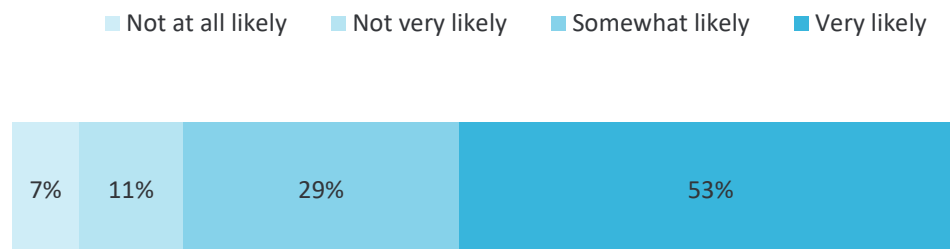
Source: Parent Information Form.

Note: N = 945 (2018); N = 296-297 (2020); N = 210-216 (2021). N/A: Question not asked that year.

Parents/caregivers in 2021 were also asked if they would get the vaccine for their child as soon as it was available for young children. More than half of the parents/caregivers attested that they are “very likely” to get their child vaccinated against COVID-19, and another 29% said they were “somewhat likely” to get the vaccine. Latino/a and lower-income parents/caregivers were less likely to say they would get the vaccine for their children. A national survey of parents/caregivers of children under 5 conducted in late 2021 found only 20% were certain they would immunize their children against COVID-19.<sup>xxxv</sup> Another national study found Black and lower-income parents/caregivers were more likely to be hesitant than other parents/caregivers to get their children vaccinated.<sup>xxxvi</sup>



Figure 32. **Likelihood Parent/Caregiver Will Get the COVID-19 Vaccine for Their Child**



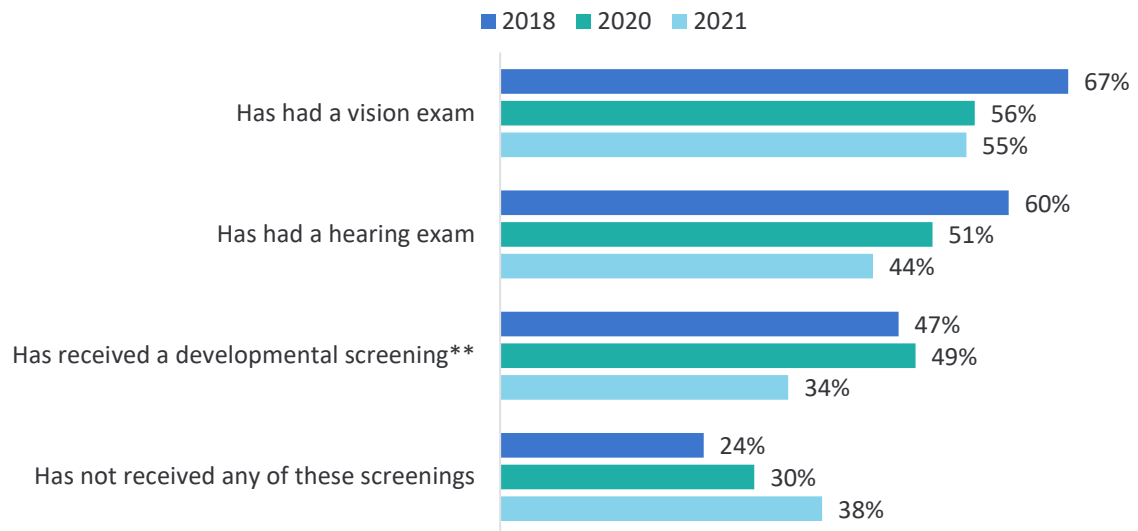
Source: Parent Information Form.

Note: N = 215. Question not asked in 2018 or 2020.

Parents/caregivers also reported whether the child had received a hearing, vision, or developmental screening in the prior year. Just over half of children had received a vision screening, while 44% had received a hearing screening, and about one-third had received a developmental screening in the past year. Children were less likely to have received a developmental screening in 2021 than they were in 2020.

Children were **less likely to receive developmental screenings** in 2021 than they were in 2020

Figure 33. **Children's Access to Screenings in the Past Year**



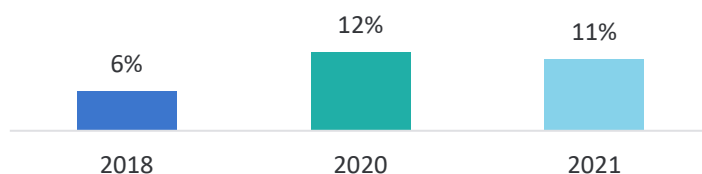
Source: Parent Information Form.

Note: N = 894-983 (2018); N = 300 (2020); N = 214 (2021). \*\*Differences are statistically significant,  $p < .01$ .

## Special Needs and Access to Intervention Services

According to parents/caregivers, 11% of children in the 2021 sample had a special need diagnosed by a professional, twice the proportion reported by parents/caregivers in 2018 and a similar proportion as that of 2020.

Figure 34. **Percent of Children with a Diagnosed Special Need**



Source: Parent Information Form.

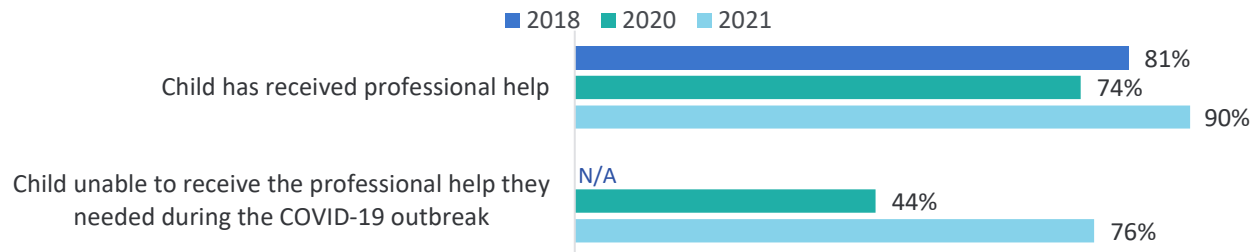
Note: N = 1,247 (2018); N = 305 (2020); N = 206 (2021).

Among children with special needs in the 2021 sample, 90% had received professional help for their special need, up from 81% in 2018 and 74% in 2020. Out of the 17 children with special needs in the



current study, 13 were unable to receive the professional help they needed during COVID-19. In contrast, across the state, 75% of families with children who have special needs said they received services during the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>xxxvii</sup>

Figure 35. **Access to Intervention Services**



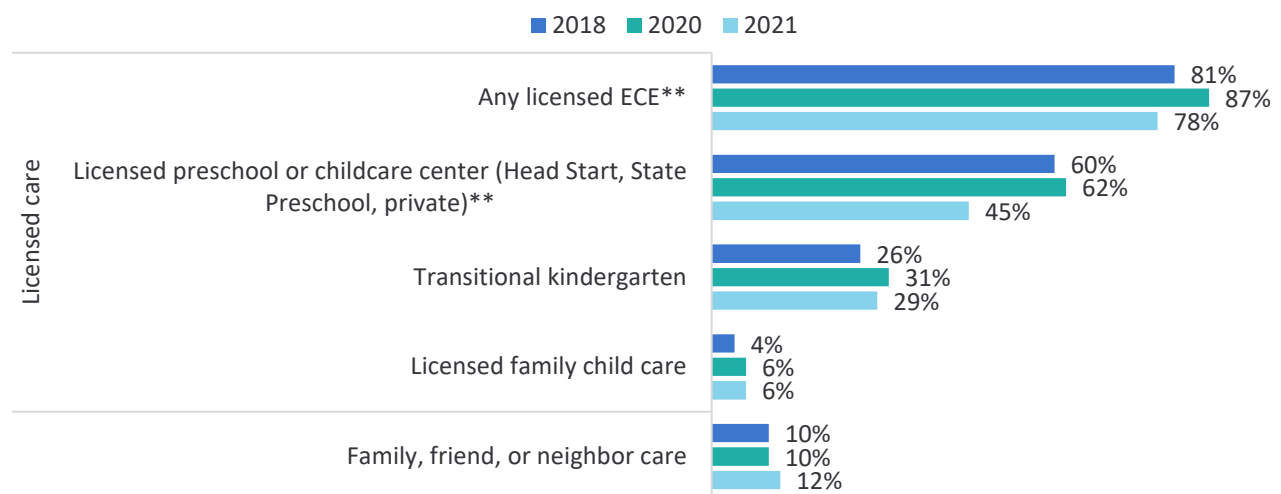
Source: Parent Information Form.

Note: N = 75 (2018); N = 35 (2020); N = 17 (2021). N/A: Question not asked in 2018.

## Early Learning Access

Quality early childhood education (ECE) programs contribute to significant gains in cognitive and non-cognitive skills and positive long-term outcomes, particularly for children from low socioeconomic backgrounds.<sup>xxxviii</sup> About eight in 10 children in the 2021 sample attended either licensed preschool, licensed family child care, or transitional kindergarten (TK). This ECE attendance rate is lower than it was in 2020, but similar to the rate found in 2018. Nevertheless, the study observed a decline over time in families' use of center-based care, and Latino/a families were less likely than families of other races/ethnicities to use this type of care. Many ECE sites in California closed or operated with limited capacity during the pandemic,<sup>xxxix</sup> but most closures were temporary. According to a survey of parents/caregivers in California conducted in 2021, 17% experienced child care closures at some point during the pandemic, but only 5% of respondents reported their child's site was closed as of July 2021.<sup>xl</sup>

Figure 36. **Students' Early Care Experiences**

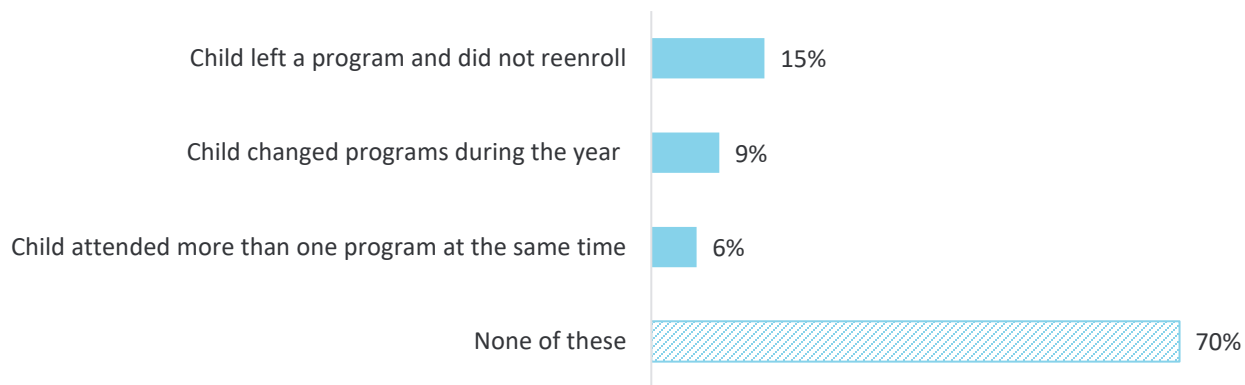


Source: Parent Information Form.

Note: N = 941-1,183 (2018); N = 336 (2020); N = 202 (2021). Percentages sum to more than 100 because more than one source of care could be selected. \*\*Differences are statistically significant,  $p < .01$ .

One in three parents/caregivers said they had experienced changes to their child's child care arrangements or their child attended more than one program in the past year.

**Figure 37. Changes to Child Care Arrangements or Attended More than One Program in Past Year**

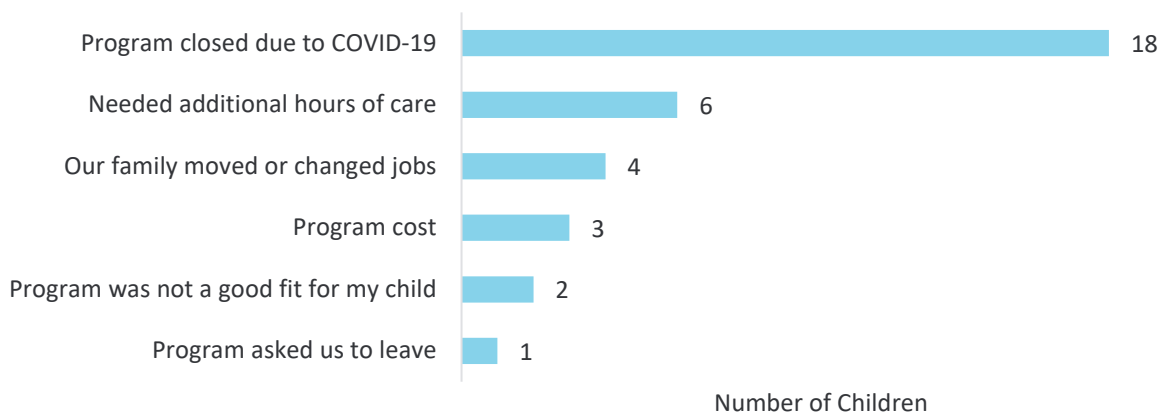


Source: Parent Information Form.

Note: N = 146. N reflects the total number of parents/caregivers who had a child who attended ECE in the previous year and replied to this question. Question not asked in 2018 or 2020.

Among 28 families who reported that their child had left, changed, or attended more than one child care or preschool program in the past year, the most common reason was program closure due to COVID-19. Access to affordable, high-quality child care was a challenge even before the pandemic, but as noted previously, COVID-19 led to closures and reduced capacity at child care sites, making it even more difficult for parents/caregivers to find a program that met their needs.

**Figure 38. Reasons Child Left, Changed, or Attended More Than One Child Care Program In Past Year**



Source: Parent Information Form.

Note: N = 28. Question not asked in 2018 or 2020.

## Section Summary

- Child health, well-being, and attendance concerns, as reported by the child's teacher, remained mostly unchanged from 2018 to 2021.
- Child resiliency levels were consistently high across the study years.
- 27% of parents/caregivers said they delayed getting medical care for their child during COVID-19, but 94% had received a well-child check-up in the prior year, and 98% were up-to-date on their immunizations
- 82% of parents/caregivers were "somewhat likely" or "very likely" to get the COVID-19 vaccine for their child once they were eligible.
- Children were less likely to receive developmental screenings in 2021 than they were in 2020.
- More children with special needs in the 2021 sample than in prior studies had received professional help, but 76% of these children were unable to receive the help they needed during the pandemic.
- About eight in 10 children in the 2021 sample attended licensed ECE, but the study observed a decline over time in families' use of center-based care, and Latino/a families were less likely than families of other races/ethnicities to use this type of care.
- One in three parents/caregivers said they had experienced changes to their child's child care arrangements or their child attended more than one program in the past year. The most common reason was program closure due to COVID-19.



## Special Section: Universal Access Pilot Services

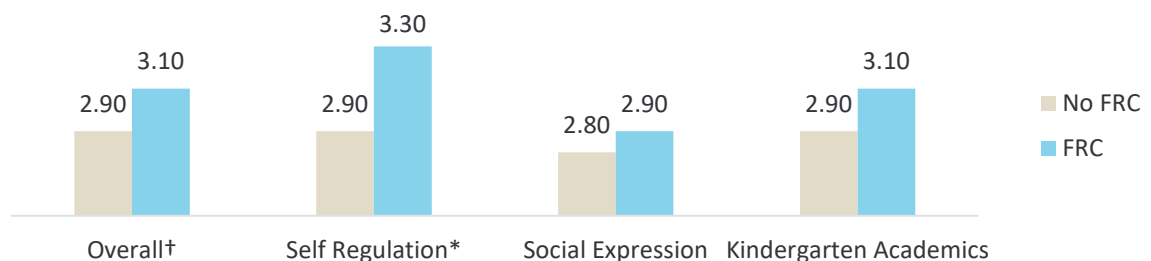
The Universal Access Pilot (UAP) is a cross-system coordinated approach to facilitate families' access to prevention supports in their communities. The UAP offers culturally responsive navigation services to support children and families along a developmental pathway toward third grade school achievement and later life success. The supports are located in the neighborhoods in and around the Alum Rock Union and Franklin-McKinley School District.

Families who are connected to **FRCs** and **QUALITY MATTERS ECE sites** have children with higher school readiness scores

This study oversampled schools in these two districts for the 2021 Santa Clara School Readiness Assessment (SRA) and in 2019, ASR conducted an assessment using the *KOF* and *PIF* in Alum Rock Union. ASR matched service-level data from FIRST 5 Santa Clara County with the *KOF* data from children to explore the relationship between service use and readiness.

The UAP facilitates access to Family Resource Centers, where families can get information and referrals for basic needs, enroll in health care services, have their child get a developmental screening, engage in a playgroup, or enroll in an evidence-based parenting class. As seen in the chart below, children in the 2019 Alum Rock SRA who participated in FIRST 5 Family Resource Center services had higher kindergarten readiness scores compared to statistically-matched children who did not engage in such services.

Figure 39. Kindergarten Readiness Score, by Family Resource Center Participation (2019)

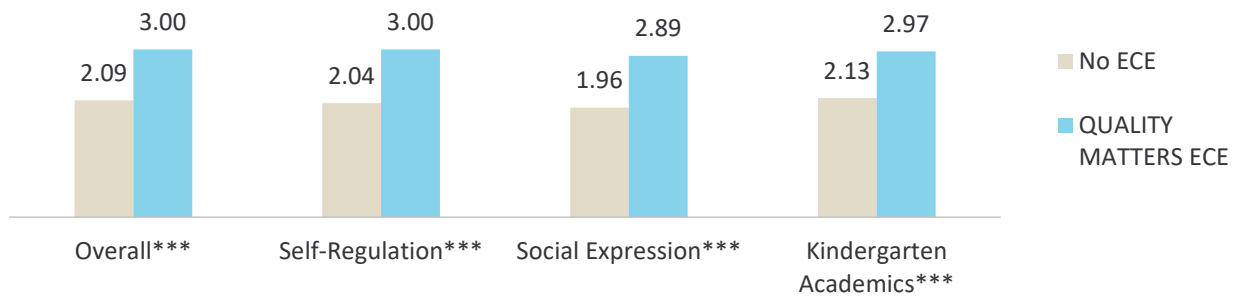


Source: Kindergarten Observation Form, Parent Information Form, FIRST 5 service records.

Note: N = 161-165 (unweighted). Estimates are adjusted for race, income, gender, age, English language learner status, and special needs. Scale = 1 – Not Yet to 4 – Proficient. †Differences are marginally significant,  $p < .10$ ; \*Differences are statistically significant,  $p < .05$ .

Similarly, ASR investigated whether children who participated in early education sites supported by FIRST 5 in the QUALITY MATTERS Initiative were more ready for kindergarten. FIRST 5 and UAP partners provided substantial support to QUALITY MATTERS centers and family child care homes, such as SEEDS of Learning training and coaching, myTeachstone online teacher education, special needs training, safety net supports (e.g., PPE, diapers), and participation in a peer-to-peer Community of Practice to support quality enhancements in early education settings. In the 2021 SRA, the study found that Alum Rock and Franklin-McKinley students who participated in a QUALITY MATTERS ECE site were more ready for kindergarten than a statistically-controlled comparison group of children with no early education experience.

Figure 40. **Kindergarten Readiness Score, by Participation in QUALITY MATTERS Early Education, Alum Rock and Franklin-McKinley Catchment Area, 2021**



Source: Kindergarten Observation Form, Parent Information Form, FIRST 5 service records.

Note: N = 51-53 (unweighted). Estimates are adjusted for race, income, gender, age, English language learner status, and special needs. Scale = 1 – Not Yet to 4 – Proficient. \*\*\*Differences are statistically significant,  $p < .001$ .

### Section Summary

- The UAP is a cross-system coordinated approach to facilitate families' access to prevention supports in their communities. UAP facilitates access to Family Resource Centers, and FIRST 5 Santa Clara and UAP partners provide support to QUALITY MATTERS ECE sites.
- Children in the 2019 Alum Rock SRA who participated in FIRST 5 Family Resource Center services had higher kindergarten readiness scores than similar children who did not participate.
- In the 2021 SRA, Alum Rock and Franklin-McKinley students who participated in QUALITY MATTERS ECE were more ready for kindergarten than children with no ECE experience.

## Summary and Discussion

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As schools transitioned back to in-person learning in the 2021-22 school year, a school readiness assessment was conducted with a small, nonrepresentative sample in Santa Clara County to explore how readiness has changed since 2018, how COVID-19 may have impacted children and families, and how families are faring as the community continues to be impacted by the pandemic. The key findings from this study and their implications are discussed below.

### ***How ready for school were children assessed in Santa Clara County?***

Fewer than one-third of the students (29%) had readiness profiles indicating they were *Fully Ready* across all three *Building Blocks* (i.e., scoring at least 3.25 in the *Self-Regulation*, *Social Expression*, and *Kindergarten Academics* domains). Over a third of students (36%) were *Not Ready* for school in any of the readiness domains. Children in the 2021 sample had lower readiness scores compared to children in the 2018 study. The drop in average scores in 2021 could be attributed to the effects of the pandemic on children and their families but also to sample differences that statistical adjustments could not fully account for.

### ***What child and family factors are associated with higher levels of school readiness?***

In the last two school readiness assessments in Santa Clara County, child demographics and the following “malleable assets” were most strongly associated with children’s readiness for school:

Early learning and kindergarten transition supports	Children attend licensed ECE and families have access to kindergarten orientations.
Child health and well-being	Children are healthy, resilient, and have healthy home routines like an early bedtime and limited screen time.
Parent/caregiver education and support	Parents/caregivers are confident in their ability to care for their children and receive information about what to expect in their child’s development.
Income and basic needs	Families are financially secure and have stable housing.

The presence of a greater number of these malleable assets significantly improved the likelihood that children came to school *Fully Ready*.

Similarly, ASR’s recent research on readiness in East San Jose has shown the benefits of services provided by FIRST 5 Santa Clara and other Universal Access Pilot partners. For example, participation in a QUALITY MATTERS early education program was associated with higher readiness among children in the Alum Rock Union and Franklin-McKinley School Districts in 2021. Likewise, a 2019 assessment in Alum Rock showed higher readiness among children whose families had accessed services from a Family Resource Center.

### ***How were children and families affected by COVID-19?***

As observed earlier, school readiness was lower in 2021 compared to 2018. This could be related to the increased levels of stress families experienced and the fact that children had fewer options for enrichment outside of the home during COVID-19. For example, the majority of families in this study experienced changes to their employment during the pandemic, such as having their work hours reduced, losing their job, or having to work from home with children around. In 2021, approximately four in five families reported pandemic-related effects on their employment, with lower-income families and Latino/a families reporting higher rates of job loss, reduction in work hours or wages, and having a job that put them at risk of getting COVID-19 relative to other families. In addition, the study found families were significantly more stressed about issues like health and making ends meet during the height of the pandemic in 2020 than they were in 2018. Parent/caregiver reports of stress declined in 2021, but health-related concerns remained above pre-pandemic levels.

The pandemic also affected families' home routines and access to kindergarten preparation opportunities. Perhaps because of COVID-19-related closures and social distancing recommendations that required families to stay at home more, over six in 10 parents/caregivers in the current year were concerned about finding enough fun and engaging activities for their children, and children in 2021 had significantly more screen time than they did in 2018. Parents/caregivers were also less likely to have received kindergarten readiness information and accessed kindergarten transition supports like kindergarten orientations and parent-teacher meetings. The ECE experience of many children was also disrupted by the pandemic; among those who left a program in 2021, the primary reason was that the program closed due to COVID-19.

Finally, access to health care was a challenge for some families during COVID-19. Although the vast majority of children in this study had received medical care in the past year and were up-to-date on their immunizations, approximately one-quarter of parents/caregivers said they had to delay getting medical care for their child during COVID-19.

### ***What will it take to “turn the curve” on school readiness in Santa Clara County?***

The current study is a snapshot of readiness based on a small sample and future studies with larger samples will be needed to develop a complete picture of readiness in Santa Clara County. Nevertheless, the findings can be used to support the community's recovery from COVID-19 and sustain and stabilize early childhood systems, including ECE. While we saw some improvements in families' experiences in 2021 relative to 2020, recovery from the pandemic has been gradual, and its lingering effects may continue to impact children's readiness for school. Children and families continue to need support to address the challenges caused by the pandemic. In particular, partners in the community should provide quality services and supports that promote the positive early experiences that are associated with school readiness and that have been most significantly impacted by the pandemic. These include, but are not limited to, access to early learning and kindergarten transition supports, medical and mental health supports, parent/caregiver education and support, and income and basic needs supports. In addition, schools need to be prepared to meet the needs of all children entering their classrooms, including those who had access to fewer resources and supports to prepare them for school.





## Early Learning and Kindergarten Transition Supports

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As utilization of kindergarten transition supports like parent/caregiver meetings and orientation sessions is positively associated with readiness, the availability of such supports at schools and early learning sites should be expanded. In addition, high-quality ECE has historically been associated with kindergarten readiness, but children’s access to it was more limited during the pandemic due to ECE site closures and fewer in-person learning opportunities. Expanding access to affordable ECE and stabilizing this essential system should be a priority in the county.



## Medical and Mental Health Services

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Children’s health and well-being is consistently linked to higher kindergarten readiness. COVID-19 led to an increased need for healthcare and mental health care services and introduced new challenges in accessing these services, including increased use of telemedicine, staff shortages, and reduced capacity at clinics and hospitals to offer routine care. The healthcare system should be strengthened and access barriers reduced (e.g., lack of technology or transportation) so that services are more affordable and accessible for families.



## Support for Parents and Caregivers

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Children benefit when their caregivers are informed and supported: children in this study had higher readiness when their caregivers had fewer parenting concerns and received more information about child development. As their child’s first teacher, parents and caregivers need services like parent education, peer support, and parent leadership programs to help them provide a healthy, nurturing early environment at home.



## Income and Basic Needs Supports

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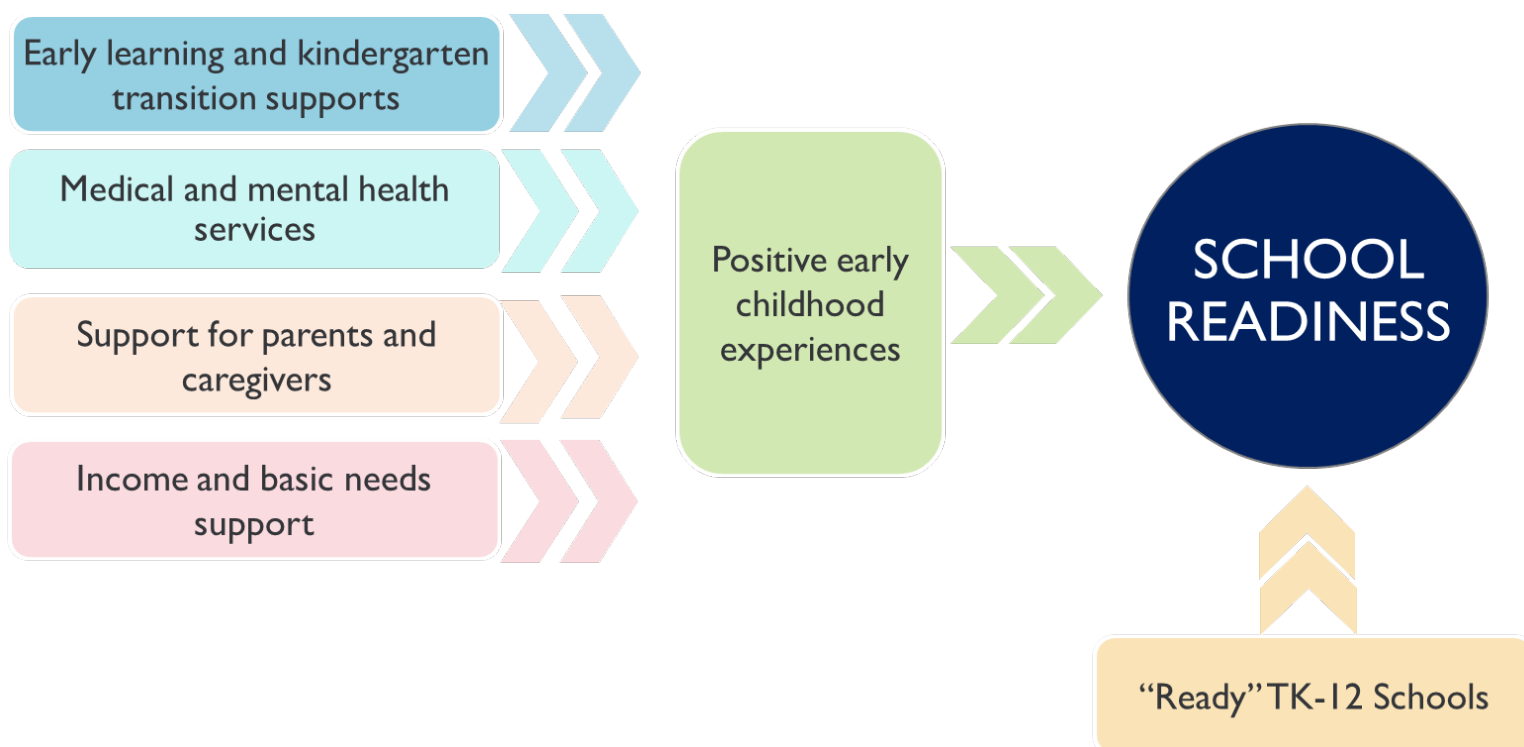
Families that are more financially secure are less stressed and have access to more resources to promote their children’s readiness. The socioeconomic and racial/ethnic differences seen in readiness are primarily rooted in structural inequities like differences in access to school readiness opportunities such as high-quality ECE.<sup>xi</sup> Poverty is also related to higher rates of stress and poor health among parents/caregivers, as well as less time and disposable income, which impact other key “malleable

assets” linked to readiness like screen time and bedtime. COVID-19 adversely impacted families’ financial stability, and many continue to need income and basic needs supports to support their children’s readiness.



## Resources to Build “Ready” TK-12 Schools

“School readiness” does not just entail the readiness of children, families, or communities, but also the readiness of TK-12 schools to meet the needs of children entering their classrooms.<sup>xlii</sup> Schools need adequate resources and supports (e.g., funding, staffing, and professional development) to smooth the transition between home and school, demonstrate sensitivity to individual and cultural differences, engage in inclusive practices that meet diverse learning needs, and engage families in the education of their children.



The first five years of life have a significant impact on children’s long-term outcomes, and thus it is wise for communities to invest in young children and their families. The UAP is a model for the kind of partnership that is needed to improve children’s school readiness and long-term outcomes, as it brings together multiple agencies to provide culturally responsive, coordinated support that facilitates families’ access to prevention services in the community. As the community continues to experience the lingering effects of COVID-19, such partnerships, policies, and programs are urgently needed to promote the health, development, well-being, and school readiness of each child in Santa Clara County.

## About the Researcher

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Applied Survey Research (ASR) is a social research firm dedicated to helping people build better communities by creating meaningful evaluative and assessment data, facilitating information-based planning, and developing custom strategies. The firm has more than 40 years of experience working with public and private agencies, health and human service organizations, city and county offices, school districts, institutions of higher learning, and charitable foundations. Through community assessments, program evaluations, and related studies, ASR provides the information that communities need for effective strategic planning and community interventions.

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- <sup>x</sup> Districts not participating included Berryessa Union, Cambrian, Gilroy, Lakeside Joint, Loma Prieta Joint Union, Los Altos, Los Gatos Union, Luther Burbank, Moreland, Mount Pleasant Elementary, Orchard Elementary, Palo Alto, Santa Clara, Saratoga, Sunnyvale, and Union.
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- <sup>xii</sup> In the Santa Clara County 2020-21 kindergarten population overall, 37% of students were Latino/a, 34% were Asian American/Pacific Islander, 16% were White, 7% were multiracial, 4% were Filipino, and 2% were Black. Source: California Department of Education. (2021). DataQuest. <https://data1.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/>
- <sup>xiii</sup> In the Santa Clara County 2020-21 kindergarten population overall, 15% of students were English Learners. Source: California Department of Education. (2021). DataQuest. <https://data1.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/>

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