



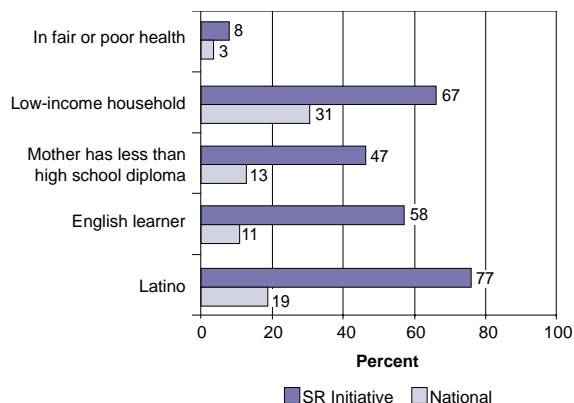
First 5 California's School Readiness Initiative

The main goal of First 5 California is to ensure that California's children are ready to succeed in school and life by the time they enter kindergarten. To reach this goal, First 5 California has invested \$413 million, including matching funds from First 5 County Commissions in its School Readiness (SR) Initiative.

Adopting the National Education Goals Panel's definition of school readiness, the SR Initiative uses a holistic approach and aims to serve the whole child, rather than focusing only on preacademic skills. The SR Initiative targets high-priority schools (those with Academic Performance Index scores in the lowest 30%) that serve communities with high levels of poverty and ethnic diversity. Accordingly, First 5 California School Readiness programs have identified and are serving some of the most needy young children in the state. Exhibit 1 shows characteristics of the children served, compared with the general population of children in the United States.

Baseline data from the Kindergarten Entry Profile, which measured children's mastery of developmental competencies needed for success in school, showed that only about one-third of children entering kindergarten in California's high-priority schools in 2004 had fully or almost mastered the skills that are important for a successful transition to kindergarten and for school success (Exhibit 2).

Exhibit 1. Demographics of Children Participating in the SR Initiative and Children Nationally

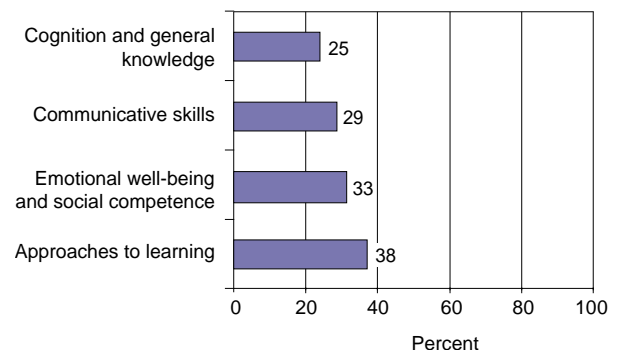


Regardless of household income and mother's educational level, children were more likely to have the developmental competencies needed to succeed in school when they:

- Had attended preschool
- Were in good health
- Were read to or participated in other literacy activities with their families regularly
- Had parents who were confident about their children's developmental, behavioral, and school readiness skills.

First 5 California's School Readiness programs are providing these advantages to thousands of California's children. Over time, these efforts will lead to long-term improvements in the academic and life achievements of children.

Exhibit 2. Children Who Fully or Almost Mastered All Relevant Skills at Kindergarten Entry



How First 5 Promotes Children's School Readiness

First 5 School Readiness (SR) programs serve children and families through high-quality early education programs and other activities designed to promote school readiness (Exhibit 3).

Exhibit 3. Number of People Who Received Selected School Readiness Services in 2003–04

Service	Number of People Served*
Early education programs	452,285
Parenting education	178,992
Health insurance enrollment	161,529
Kindergarten transition programs	141,948
Oral health treatment, screening, and prevention	139,210
Health screenings	120,834
Family literacy programs	120,004
Developmental screenings/assessments	116,379
Nutrition education and assessments	111,080

*These are not unduplicated counts.

The Kindergarten Entry Profile study found that First 5 provides the types of services that improve children's school readiness.

- **Children who attend preschool are more likely than other children to have a smooth transition to kindergarten and to have skills needed to succeed in school.**

Despite this fact, 40% of children entering schools participating in the SR Initiative had not gone to preschool. In response, SR Initiative programs are operating, expanding, and connecting families to early childhood education programs that provide young children with high-quality preschool experiences. Programs also provide services that help children who have not attended preschool make a successful transition into kindergarten. These programs also train early education providers in ways to support children's readiness for school.

- **Children whose families regularly read to them and engage in other literacy activities have higher mastery of the skills needed for school than do other children.**

The SR Initiative funds numerous family literacy and parenting education programs that encourage parents to read to and interact with their children in ways that help their development.

- **Children who are in good or excellent health make better transitions to kindergarten and have better mastery of the skills needed to succeed in school than do children who are in poor or fair health.**

Children targeted by the SR Initiative were more likely than other children to be in poor or fair health and to lack a regular medical provider and dental care. SR Initiative programs are promoting children's health by offering health screenings, and helping families enroll in health insurance programs; providing oral health treatment, screening, and prevention services; and providing nutrition education and assessments.

- **Children whose parents are concerned about their children's development make more difficult transitions to kindergarten and are less prepared for school than other children.**

Almost half of the parents (49%) had concerns about one or more aspects of their children's development, and many of these concerns had not been addressed. SR Initiative programs are addressing parents' concerns by conducting developmental and health screenings, so that children can receive critical services before they enter kindergarten. SR Initiative programs also support children with disabilities and other special needs through training for providers and through early identification and referral.

- **Children are more likely to receive services that promote school readiness when their parents receive parenting education and support services.**

SR Initiative programs also provide direct support to parents. Parents who had received these services, such as parenting classes, were more likely to read regularly to their children. The children were more likely to participate in an early childhood education program, have a regular doctor and medical home, and receive a developmental screening—all important predictors of school readiness.

The 2003–04 Annual Report and Kindergarten Entry Profiles report are available at www.first5eval.org. More information about First 5 is available at www.ccfcc.ca.gov. This brief was prepared by SRI International for the First 5 California Children and Families Commission.