



MAY 2010

Our Children, Our Kindergartners

Examining the
School Readiness of
Monterey County's Children



Six Top Predictors of Kindergarten Readiness in Monterey County

1. Parents have completed high school or more.
2. Parents believe their children transitioned easily into kindergarten.
3. Children experience social and emotional well-being.
4. Parents read books or tell stories to their children.
5. Children have already attended preschool.
6. Families take part in three or more kindergarten transition activities.



Fast Facts & Key Findings

Then and Now: Comparing Readiness Gains Since 2004

- For the 2009 assessment, 100 kindergarten teachers completed a child observation checklist of more than 1,800 students to measure social and emotional well-being, communication skills, learning approaches, and cognition.
- The child observation checklist revealed that there is still a great need for continued improvement. The assessment found that the largest number of children were ready in their approaches to learning, while fewer students were ready in the other three developmental domains.
- Between 2006 and 2009, the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA) showed a gain of nine percentage points in cognition and general knowledge, and a gain of nine percentage points in social and emotional well-being.
- KRA studies in 2004, 2006, and 2009 demonstrate that children attending elementary schools in First 5 Monterey County (F5MC) catchment areas have made significant improvements in kindergarten readiness.

Cultivating Success: When Parents Participate, Children Master More Skills

- While only 51 percent of parents reported “reading books” with their children daily, reading had one of the greatest impacts on kindergarten readiness.
- Children who attended preschool demonstrated more kindergarten readiness than their non-preschool peers.
- Children whose parents participated in three or more transition activities, like meeting with kindergarten teachers and school principals, were more likely to have mastered developmental domains upon entering kindergarten.

Influencers on the Front Lines: Kindergarten Teachers and Early Childhood Educators

- Kindergarten teachers and early childhood educators agree that social and emotional

well-being is the most important domain for children to master before starting and completing kindergarten.

- The importance of practices that promote social and emotional development are strongly supported by kindergarten teachers and early childhood educators. The practices include how well kindergarteners in Monterey County interact with classmates and adults, how willing they are to ask for help when needed, and how successful they are at controlling their emotions.
- All educators would benefit from expanded training in three key areas: children with special needs, kindergarten transition, and English learner instruction.
- Below are the top three activities educators recommend for parents seeking to prepare their young children for kindergarten:
 1. Read to your child
 2. Spend time playing with your child
 3. Help your child learn by engaging in active exploration.

Children and Families: More Participants

- Nearly one-third (30 percent) of the County’s incoming kindergarteners participated in the 2009 assessment, a 19 percent increase from the 2006 assessment. This larger sampling size has provided us with even more reliable data.
- Latino children represent more than three-quarters (77 percent) of the countywide student population of kindergarteners.
- Nearly half of parents (46 percent) surveyed speak solely Spanish as their primary language.
- More than half of the parents (51 percent) surveyed who have not graduated high school have children who attend low-performing schools.
- Nearly two-thirds (64 percent) of families with children attending low-performing schools¹ are living at or below the poverty line.

¹ School performance is based on the Academic Performance Index (API), a measure which reflects the standing of a school based on the results of statewide testing. Schools are categorized into low, medium and high.

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Welcome

The quality of early childhood learning is inextricably linked to kindergarten readiness and a young child's potential for success in school. Children who develop social, emotional, and cognitive skills in their early years forge a strong foundation for learning later in life.² It is up to parents, families, teachers, schools, and communities to strengthen that foundation so that children can grow up to become successful, productive members of society.

Evidence abounds that families and teachers in Monterey County recognize the vital link between early education and later success. To document and inform their shared progress, First 5 Monterey County (F5MC) commissioned Harder+Company Community Research to conduct an assessment of kindergarten readiness. In this report, we present key findings on the readiness of Monterey County children who entered kindergarten in 2009. Topics include developmental competencies of children, characteristics associated with school readiness, and ways in which parents and teachers are helping to prepare young children.

F5MC is committed to serving as a catalyst for improved early education in our community. As proof of that commitment, we have supported implementation of the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA) in 2004, 2006, and 2009. Whether you are a policymaker, educator, parent, or teacher, we invite you to use this latest report as a working tool to help target services, refine messages, and promote best practices among the families and educators whose tireless efforts guide the future success of children throughout Monterey County.



organizations, and public entities together to strengthen system-wide services that support school readiness for children in our County.

Signs of Change: What's New in the 2009 Assessment

■ **Early childhood educators now included among survey participants.** Preschool teachers and early childhood educators have enormous impact on how successfully children transition into kindergarten. For this report, we surveyed both kindergarten teachers and early childhood educators to assess commonalities and differences among practices and beliefs. Our hope is to inform and encourage greater collaboration among these individuals who guide children before and after entry into kindergarten.

■ **When parents participate, children do better.** This year, we asked parents if they had participated in one or more of eight kindergarten transition activities. The most commonly performed activities were: (1) tour the school and/or visit kindergarten classrooms (85 percent); (2) receive a letter or written information (83 percent); and, (3) meet with school principal or other staff (70 percent). We found a direct correlation between parents who participated in three or more activities like these and children most likely to master skills related to social and emotional well-being, communication, approaches to learning, and overall readiness.

■ **Social and emotional competency allows children to succeed.** This year we found an even stronger correlation between children who master skills related to social and emotional well-being and their ability to master other developmental domains. Among the social and emotional well-being skills observed were the ability to interact easily with adults and peers, the willingness to ask for help when needed, and the ability to control emotions.

Translating Ideas into Action: How You Can Use the Findings in this Report

■ **Gain a deeper understanding of children and families.** With data captured on 30 percent of all incoming kindergartners in Monterey County, our 2009 report is a valuable resource for school administrators, district officials, funders, and policymakers. It also provides a timely "reality check" for parents, teachers, and early educators.

■ **Inform decisions that impact quality of early learning programs.** Local funders and policymakers can reference findings in this report to allocate funds and track progress of Monterey County's youngest children.

■ **Guide classroom planning.** Each of the 28 schools participating in the 2009 KRA received school-level findings to help guide classroom planning.

■ **Obtain funding.** In the past, KRA data has enabled schools to obtain funding for early learning and kindergarten transition activities.³

■ **Spearhead collaborative efforts among stakeholders.** The 2009 KRA gives F5MC an opportunity to bring parents, early educators, teachers, schools, community

2 U.S. Department of Education. National Center for Education Statistics. *America's Kindergartners*, NCEs 2000-070, by Kristin Denton, Elvira Germino-Hausken. Project Officer, Jerry West, Washington, DC: 2000.

3 See Exhibit 10 for a full list of kindergarten transition activities targeted to parents. For a full list of kindergarten transition activities targeted to providers, see Exhibit 18.

Who, What, and How: A Framework for the 2009 Kindergarten Readiness Assessment

Monterey County is distinctive in population characteristics and needs, yet all three KRA reports produced by F5MC since 2004 found that family characteristics and early learning practices align with national trends. Among such trends reflected in this latest report are the value of preschool attendance, the positive impact of parents reading to their children, and the link between social and emotional well-being and school readiness. These and other findings affirm the importance of the KRA, which is the only research study that tracks *local* data on the role of children, families, and teachers in supporting kindergarten readiness.

Who Participated: Characteristics of Survey Participants

- **Race/Ethnicity.** More than three-fourths (77 percent) of the children entering kindergarten in Monterey County were reported as Latino, followed by multiracial (9 percent) and white (7 percent). All other racial/ethnic groups accounted for 7 percent.
- **Primary Language.** Nearly half (46 percent) of all parents of incoming kindergarteners reported Spanish only as their primary language, while 33 percent reported speaking multiple languages. More than one-fifth (21 percent) of parents reported speaking English only.
- **Parent’s Level of Education.** Among parents of the County’s incoming kindergarteners, 45 percent reported having less than a high school education, while 20 percent had earned a high school or equivalent degree. Thirty six percent of parents surveyed reported having more than a high school education (e.g., had taken college courses or earned a college degree or higher).

- **Federal Poverty Level Status.** Nearly three-fifths (57 percent) of parents of incoming kindergarteners were identified as living at or below the 2009 Federal Poverty Level.⁴ A greater proportion of families living in poverty have children who attend low-performing schools.
- **Child Health Insurance.** An overwhelming majority (96 percent) of families reported having health insurance coverage for their children. Countywide, the most common sources of children’s health insurance are:
 - Medi-Cal: 41 percent.
 - Healthy Families: 26 percent.
 - Employer-provided Insurance: 24 percent.
 - Private Pay Insurance: 8 percent.
 - All Other Insurance Sources: 6 percent.

- **Child Health Ratings.** Among the parents surveyed, 45 percent rated their child’s health as “excellent,” followed by 31 percent who rated their child’s health as “very good.” Five percent of families rated their child’s health as “fair” or “poor.”

Child’s Race/Ethnicity	
77%	Latino
9%	Multiracial
7%	White
7%	All other groups
Family Language	
46%	Spanish only
33%	Multiple languages
21%	English only
Parent Level of Education	
14%	Less than 6th grade
30%	Between 6th and some high school
20%	High school diploma or equivalent
25%	More than high school
7%	College degree
4%	Higher than college degree
Household Income	
47%	\$20,000 or less
18%	\$20,001 - \$30,000
12%	\$30,001 - \$40,000
7%	\$40,001 - \$50,000
16%	\$50,000+

How Participants Were Sampled: Establishing the Framework

- **Sample representative of the entire county.** Kindergarteners sampled for the 2009 KRA were identified using a stratified random sampling framework. The sampling stratifications were based primarily on API ratings (low, medium, and high) of schools and demographic variables such as race/ethnicity and gender. Once the framework was established, schools within each API level were randomly selected until reaching the desired sample size. This sampling strategy means that findings are applicable to the entire kindergarten population of Monterey County.
- **Large sample size.** Statistical reliability of the 2009 KRA is considered to be quite high due in part to the large size of the sample. The sample size enabled the analysis to detect statistically significant differences across key variables. Therefore, key results of the 2009 KRA demonstrated ample statistical power for most statistical tests (i.e., 0.80 out of a maximum of 1.0).



KRA Year	Schools	Kindergarten Students	Families	Kindergarten Teachers	Early Childhood Educators
2004	14	866	876	n/a	n/a
2006	26	1,518	1,347	74	n/a
2009	28	1,813	1,857	100	87

4 For more information on the development of the MDRDP, please visit the First 5 California website at www.cffc.ca.gov.

What We Looked At: Data Collection and Analysis

■ Child observation checklists.

Checklists were completed by 100 kindergarten teachers for each child in their classroom between 30 and 60 days after the start of the school year. Checklists were completed for a total of 1,813 children, a 19 percent increase over the 2006 assessment. This year's assessment produced an overall response rate of 75 percent. The checklist, known as the Modified Desired Results Developmental Profile (MDRDP), is an abbreviated version of a similar checklist developed by the California Department of Education. The profile collects information across four developmental domains: (1) social and emotional well-being; (2) communication skills; (3) approaches to learning; and, (4) cognition and general knowledge. Teachers who completed the child observation checklist rated mastery level of each student in each domain as "not yet", "emerging", "almost mastered", or "fully mastered".

■ **Family surveys.** Written in English and Spanish, surveys were distributed by 100 kindergarten teachers at the start of the school year. The surveys were sent home with children who gave them to their parents or caregivers to be completed and returned. A total of 1,857 parents completed the surveys – 37 percent more than the 2006 KRA. Overall, 78



percent of families who received a survey completed it and sent it back. Survey topics included family characteristics, child health status, school readiness activities, kindergarten transition, and parental support.

■ Kindergarten teachers and early childhood educator surveys.

Educators were asked to complete surveys about their backgrounds, experience, qualifications, and teaching philosophy. The surveys also gathered information about the nature and quality of the classroom learning environment, use of kindergarten transition activities, and level of involvement among teachers and parents. This was the first time early childhood educator data was

collected and a total of 100 kindergarten teachers and 87 early childhood educators responded.

■ **Data analysis.** All survey data were entered into the statistical analysis software database Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). We used multiple analysis techniques to examine frequencies, averages, cross-tabulations, and multivariable analyses. A total of 1,576 MDRDP and family surveys were matched (child to parent with a 92 percent match rate) and merged into a database. We then compared children's school readiness with family activities and other family-influenced factors using chi-squares, correlations, and logistic regression analyses.



What Teachers Observed: Children's Readiness for School

In this chapter, we take a closer look at findings across the four developmental domains. Various tables and charts provide a summary of findings and include data from the 2006 KRA for ease of comparison. In the latter part of this chapter, we present longitudinal trends of school readiness among children across Monterey County.

Four Developmental Domains, Four Rating Choices

For their survey responses, teachers were asked to rate each child's mastery of the four domains using one of the following responses:

- 1. Not yet** – The child never exhibits the behavior.
- 2. Emerging** – The child is just beginning to exhibit the behavior.
- 3. Almost mastered** – The child exhibits the behavior on an increasingly regular basis but has not yet fully mastered it.
- 4. Fully mastered** – The child typically and regularly exhibits the behavior.

Domain 1: Social and Emotional Well-Being

The first measure of school readiness addresses how well kindergarteners in Monterey County interact with classmates and adults, how willing they are to ask for help when needed, and how successful they are at controlling their emotions. Child development research has shown that children who master these key components of social and emotional well-being often become higher achievers at school. The three most pertinent findings from the 2009 KRA are:

- Between 2006 and 2009, notable gains were made within each of the Academic Performance Index (API) levels in Monterey County.
- 30 percent of kindergarteners in Monterey County schools “almost” or “fully” mastered all nine items in the social and emotional well-being domain.
- Countywide, between 45 and 62 percent of children “almost” or “fully” mastered any one of the nine items in the social and emotional well-being domain.

Percentage of children who almost or fully mastered behaviors associated with social and emotional well-being

Exhibit 1	Social and Emotional Well-Being	Percentage Fully or Almost Mastered				
		Countywide <i>n</i> =1,797	Low API <i>n</i> =1,457	Medium API <i>n</i> =202	High API <i>n</i> =138	KRA 2006 <i>n</i> =1,518
	Seeks adult help when appropriate	62.3	60.3	67.8	75.4	59.8
	Follows rules when participating in routine activities	60.4	56.9	71.4	81.2	59.6
	Understands and follows rules in different settings	60.0	56.6	68.5	82.6	57.0
	Participates in cooperative group efforts (e.g., group project or game, taking turns)	59.1	56.2	65.5	80.4	57.9
	Comforts self and controls the expression of emotion with adult guidance	57.1	53.5	66.0	81.9	58.1
	Exhibits impulse control and self-regulation (e.g., waits for turn on playground equipment, shows some patience.)	53.6	49.7	65.0	79.0	53.0
	Seeks adult help after trying to resolve conflict or problems on his or her own	52.6	49.9	56.9	74.6	47.9
	Expresses empathy or caring for others	52.3	48.2	64.0	79.0	52.9
	Negotiates with peers to resolve social conflicts with adult guidance	45.1	41.4	54.7	70.1	45.9
	Percent of children who almost/fully mastered ALL Social and Emotional items	30.8	27.5	38.2	55.8	21.5

Domain 2: Communication Skills

For the second developmental domain, we assessed how effectively kindergarteners acquired language skills, and how well they used those skills to communicate with their peers, teachers, and other adults at school. Teachers were asked to take special notice of language comprehension and language expression. Key findings within this domain are:

- In all but one of the six skill areas, communication skills improved between 2006 and 2009. Only one skill area showed a minor drop of less than one percent.
- 26 percent of kindergarteners in Monterey County schools “almost” or “fully” mastered all six items in the communication skills domain.
- Across Monterey County, between 43 and 59 percent of children “almost” or “fully” mastered any one of the six items in the communication skills domain.

Domain 3: Positive Approaches to Learning

For this domain, we asked kindergarten teachers to notice how closely their students observed their surroundings, and whether they exhibited a natural curiosity. Teachers also rated how eager children were to take part in new learning activities, and whether they demonstrated patience and perseverance with new tasks. The 2009 findings revealed that:

- One-third of children countywide “almost” or “fully” mastered all three items in this learning dimension.
- Between 41 and 59 percent of children “almost” or “fully” mastered any one of the three items in the learning domain.
- This domain showed the smallest gain between 2006 and 2009 among the four developmental domains.

Percentage of children who almost or fully mastered skills needed for effective communication

Exhibit 2	Communication Skills	Percentage Fully or Almost Mastered				
		Countywide <i>n</i> =1,797	Low API <i>n</i> =1,456	Medium API <i>n</i> =203	High API <i>n</i> =138	KRA 2006 <i>n</i> =1,518
	Follows two-step requests that are sequential, but not necessarily related	58.8	55.6	68.0	79.0	55.9
	Participates in songs, rhymes, games, and stories that play with sounds of language	55.6	53.4	57.0	76.1	54.2
	Understands complex, multi-step requests	45.4	41.0	62.9	65.9	38.7
	Engages in conversations that develop a thought or idea	43.9	41.3	52.7	58.7	44.7
	Understands increasing number of specialized words	43.2	39.0	58.6	63.8	36.9
	Tells about own experiences in a logical sequence	43.1	39.4	57.0	60.9	42.4
	Percent of children who almost/fully mastered ALL Communication Skill items	26.4	23.4	36.2	43.5	24.3

Percentage of children who almost or fully mastered skills that indicate a positive approach to learning

Exhibit 3	Approaches to Learning	Percentage Fully or Almost Mastered				
		Countywide <i>n</i> =1,768	Low API <i>n</i> =1,423	Medium API <i>n</i> =207	High API <i>n</i> =138	KRA 2006 <i>n</i> =1,518
	Stays with or repeats a task	59.2	56.4	65.2	79.6	57.6
	Shows willingness to take risks in learning new skills	56.2	53.9	63.1	71.0	56.0
	Observes and examines natural phenomena through senses	40.9	37.4	52.7	59.4	38.3
	Percent of children who almost/fully mastered ALL Positive Approaches to Learning items	33.3	30.3	44.0	48.6	32.3



Domain 4: Cognition and General Knowledge

Among the 12 indicators observed by teachers in the cognition and general knowledge domain were an ability to order objects by size, recognizing print in their environment, and using picture and letters to express ideas. Research has shown that children who demonstrate social and emotional well-being in their early years are better equipped to master developmentally appropriate cognitive and general knowledge skills once they enter kindergarten.

- 22 percent of children countywide “almost” or “fully” mastered all 12 items in this domain area.
- Between 35 and 62 percent of children countywide “almost” or “fully” mastered any one of the 12 items in the cognition and general knowledge domain.
- This domain showed some of the largest gains since we conducted the 2006 KRA across Monterey County and within each API grouping.

Percentage of children who almost or fully mastered skills that characterize cognition and general knowledge

Exhibit 4	Cognition and General Knowledge	Percentage Fully or Almost Mastered				
		Countywide <i>n</i> =1,803	Low API <i>n</i> =1,459	Medium API <i>n</i> =206	High API <i>n</i> =138	KRA 2006 <i>n</i> =1,518
	Writes 3 or more letters or numbers	61.9	59.7	65.9	79.7	58.8
	Pretends to read books	59.9	56.3	69.3	83.3	56.7
	Understands that numbers represent quantity	52.9	49.3	57.5	84.1	48.8
	Makes 3 or more letter-sound correspondences (e.g., knows the letter “b” makes the “buhh” sound)	52.9	50.4	56.5	73.9	43.3
	Uses pretend writing during play activities	52.9	51.5	55.6	63.8	42.8
	Uses pictures and letters to express thoughts and ideas	52.6	49.0	62.9	74.6	46.5
	Draws a picture related to a story and talks about drawing	52.3	49.8	58.5	70.3	49.1
	Orders objects from smallest to largest	52.2	48.3	59.7	85.6	46.3
	Understands that letters make up words	51.1	48.9	54.6	68.8	48.6
	Recognizes print in the environment	46.2	43.7	50.2	66.7	41.2
	Engages in discussion about books	44.0	40.5	56.1	63.0	42.6
	Understands numbers and simple operations, and uses math manipulatives, games, toys, coins in daily activities	35.4	31.1	48.8	60.9	28.9
	Percent of children who almost/fully mastered ALL Cognition and General Knowledge items	22.5	19.3	31.4	42.8	13.7

Significant Strides: Trends Over Time

In conducting the 2009 KRA, we had the opportunity to look closely at longitudinal trends of school readiness throughout Monterey County, across API levels and among the elementary schools in the F5MC school readiness catchment area of Seaside, East Salinas, King City, San Ardo, and San Lucas.



Exhibit 5 outlines the proportion of children who “almost” or “fully” mastered all items in each of the four school readiness domains. Overall, the largest proportion of children “almost” or “fully” mastered the positive approaches to learning domain. However, Exhibit 6 clearly shows that countywide, the most significant gains were made in the domains of cognition and general knowledge and social and emotional well-being (a gain of 9 percentage points in each domain area).

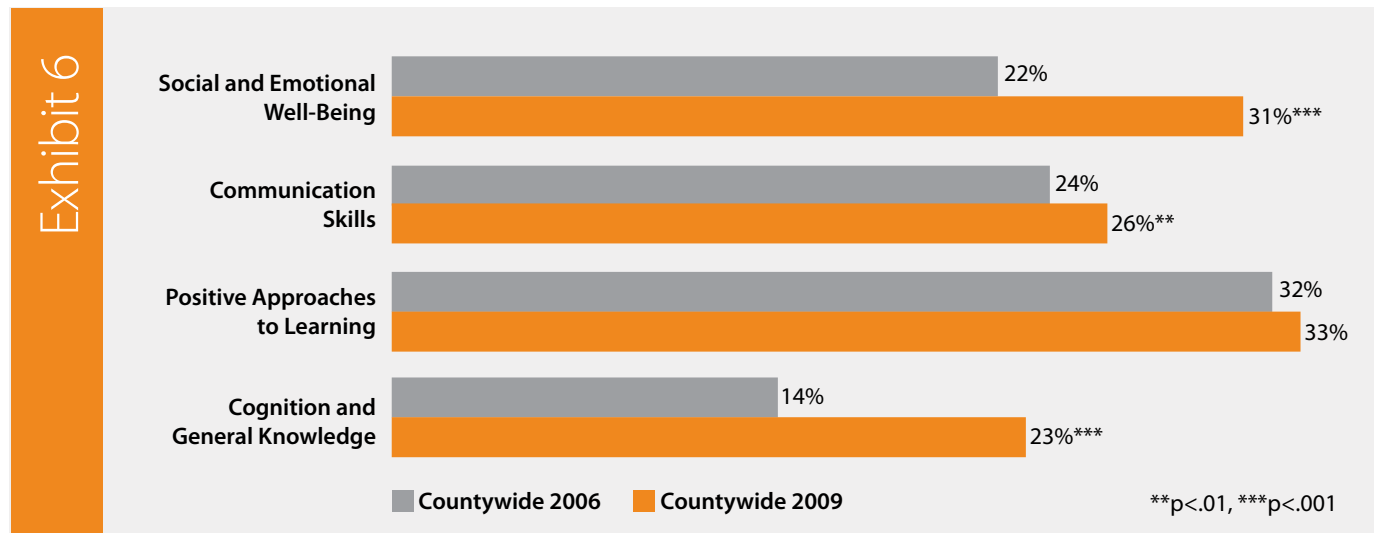
As Exhibit 7 clearly indicates, while there is still much room for improvement among children in Monterey County’s low-performing schools, many students demonstrated notable gains across all four developmental domains. Among these schools, two domains showed an increase of 9 percentage points since 2006: the domain of cognition and general knowledge, and the domain of social and emotional well-being.

In 2004, F5MC and State First 5 commissioned a kindergarten readiness assessment of 14 low-API schools encompassed by the local School Readiness (SR) Collaborative efforts at that time. Ten of those original schools elected to participate in the 2006 and 2009 assessments. During this five-year period, we can see in Exhibit 8 that impressive strides in school readiness have been realized and over time these areas have become more closely aligned with countywide trends.

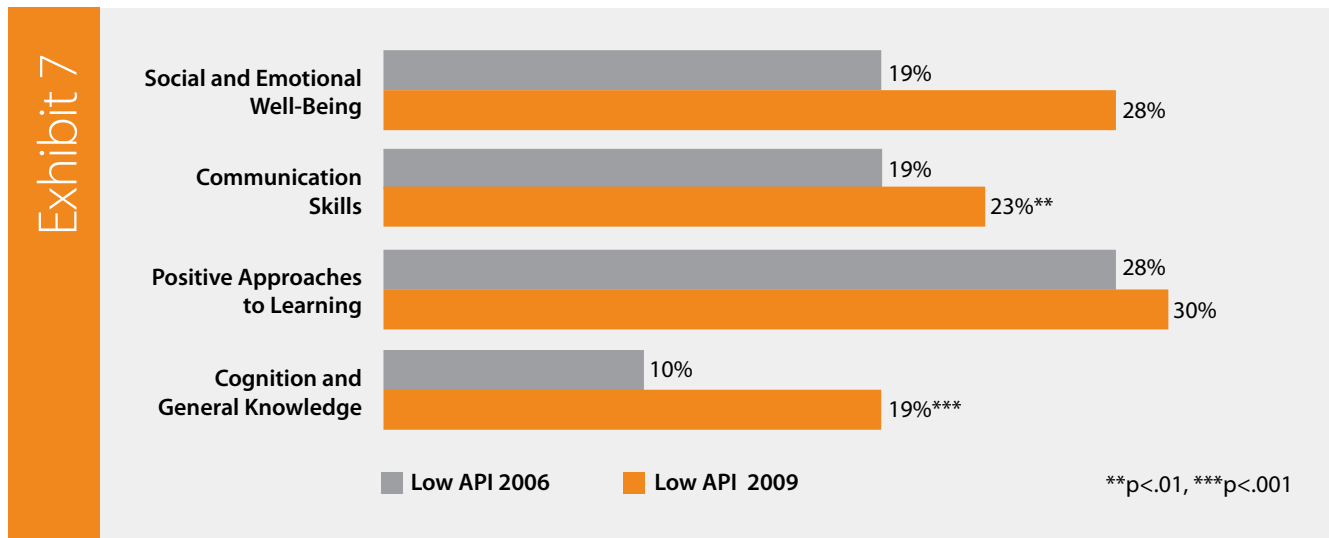
Percent of children who almost or fully mastered each MDRDP Dimension

Exhibit 5	School Readiness Domains	Percentage Fully or Almost Mastered				
		Countywide <i>n</i> =1,803	Low API <i>n</i> =1,459	Medium API <i>n</i> =207	High API <i>n</i> =138	KRA 2006 <i>n</i> =1,518
	Social and Emotional Well-Being	30.8	27.5	38.2	55.8	21.5
	Communication Skills	26.4	23.4	36.2	43.5	24.3
	Positive Approaches to Learning	33.3	30.3	44.0	48.6	32.3
	Cognition and General Knowledge	22.5	19.3	31.4	42.8	13.7

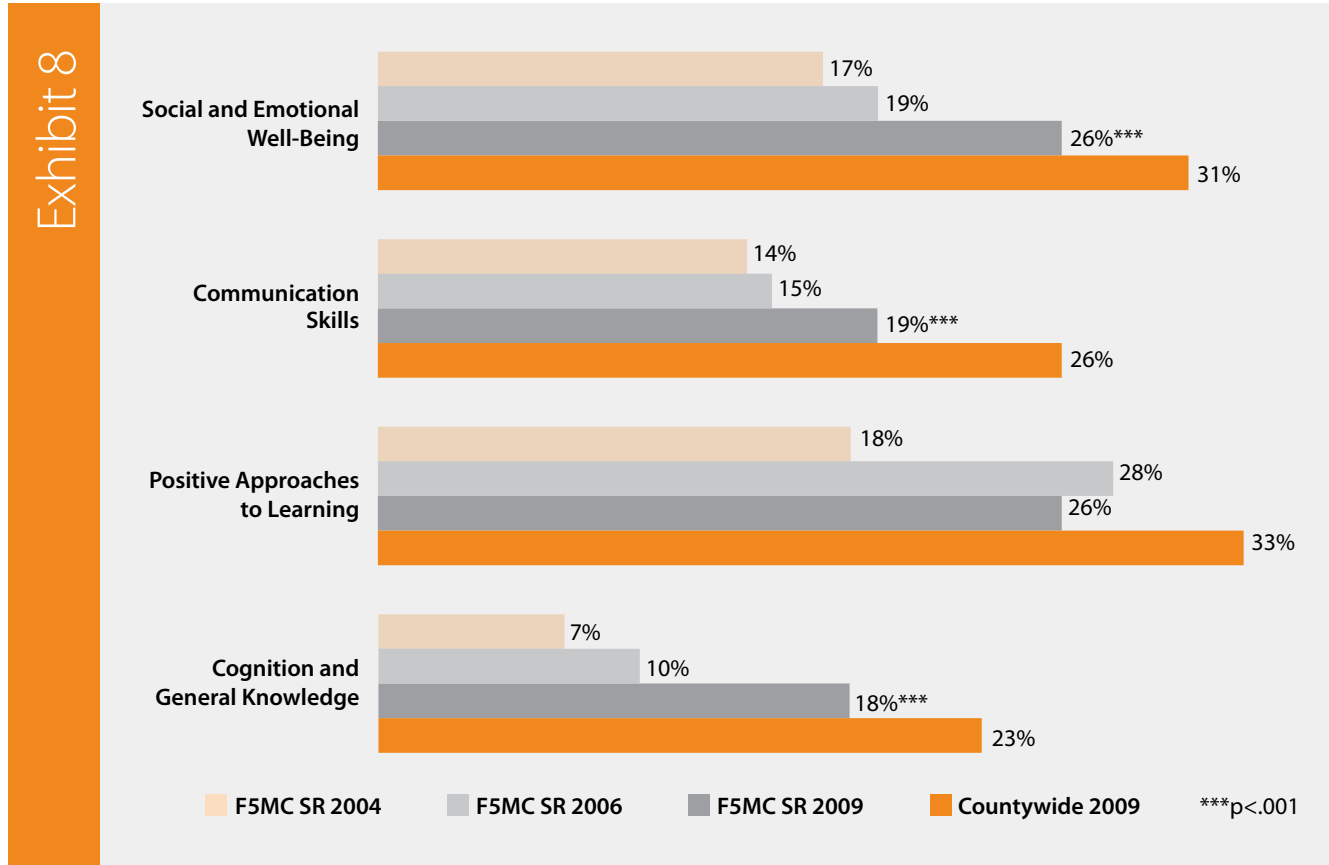
Percent of children countywide who almost or fully mastered all items



Percent of students at Low API schools who almost or fully mastered all items



Percent of children in F5MC School Readiness Catchment Schools who almost or fully mastered all items



Why Families Matter: Supporting School Readiness at Home

One of the most profound influences in a young child's life is the quality of their home environment. When families help their children to discover the fun of learning, it can have a positive and lasting impact on their child's readiness for – and success in – school. In this chapter, we'll describe what families in Monterey County are doing to support school readiness. Our findings are based on surveys received from 1,857 parents and caregivers of children who participated in the 2009 KRA. The surveys – produced in both English and Spanish – were distributed by kindergarten teachers at the start of the 2009 school year.



Parent-Child Interactions: Hands-on Help and Shared Activities

Parents can prepare their children for kindergarten by taking time to engage with them in a range of developmentally appropriate activities. A simple act like helping a child learn to tie their shoes, singing a song together, or reading a story can contribute to school readiness. For the 2009 KRA, we asked parents to tell us how often they engaged in these early learning activities in the year before their child entered kindergarten.

With respect to parent/child activities, we found little change between the 2006 and 2009 KRA studies. The most common daily activity reported was “practice self-help skills” (85 percent in 2009 up from 83 percent in 2006). This activity was followed closely by “watch television or video” (84 percent in 2009 up from 81 percent in 2006). The one activity proven to have the greatest impact on school readiness, “read stories or books,” remained the least-reported daily activity (51 percent in 2009 up from 43 percent in 2006). Exhibit 9 lists parent child activities ranked by daily frequency. .

Parent participation in parent/child activities

Exhibit 9	Did the following activities with their child...	Daily
	Practice self-help skills (e.g., buttoning clothes or tying shoes) (n=1,816)	84.5%
	Watch television or videos (n=1,795)	83.5%
	Play with other children of the same age (n=1,818)	76.5%
	Sing songs (n=1,767)	63.9%
	Practice kindergarten skills (n=1,822)	64.3%
	Practice daily routines of getting ready for school (n=1,781)	62.2%
	Practice letters, numbers, or words (n=1,799)	53.2%
	Read stories/books or show pictures from books (n=1,805)	51.2%

Parent-School Interactions: Kindergarten Transition Activities

Once a parent registers their child for kindergarten, the parents are encouraged to participate in a number of activities that are designed to ease the transition to school. For the 2009 KRA, we asked parents to quantify their involvement in these activities. As illustrated in Exhibit 10, the top two activities that parents engaged in were “tour the school and/or visit kindergarten classroom” and the more passive “receive a letter or written information.”

Parents with a lower level of education frequently participated in four activities. Among these were touring the school or visiting the kindergarten classroom, receiving written information, having their child's skills and development assessed, and receiving a phone call or home visit. Interestingly, the KRA found a correlation between parent participation in three or more kindergarten transition activities and readiness for school.

Parents were also asked to rate the ease of their child's transition into kindergarten. Nearly three-fourths (74 percent) of parents countywide rated this transition as “easy” or “somewhat easy.”

Notably, these responses were reported more frequently from parents who had graduated high school and pursued further education.

Parent participation in kindergarten transition activities

Exhibit 10		Percentage Participation			
		Countywide n=1,747	Less than high school n=731	High school or equivalent n=332	More than high school n=624
	Tour the school and/or visit kindergarten classroom	62.3	64.7	61.1	59.8
	Receive a letter or written information	61.9	65.8	62.7	56.5
	Have child's skills and development assessed	49.7	55.5	47.5	44.2
	Meet with school principal or other staff	46.8	47.6	41.0	49.2
	Meet with kindergarten teacher	42.2	42.1	39.5	43.8
	Participate in school-wide activities	37.2	34.3	36.7	48.3
	Receive a phone call or home visit	16.9	20.7	18.1	12.0

Early Care Environments: Where Young Children Spend Their Time

How and where young children spend their time can often influence their readiness for kindergarten. It is evident that young children have very different experiences being cared for in the home environment and outside of home. To gain a deeper understanding about these differences for the 2009 KRA, we asked parents to tell us where their child spent time during the day during the year preceding kindergarten.⁵

Findings related to early care and preschool education environments tracked closely with the 2006 KRA. A majority of respondents (90 percent) noted that their children spent the most time at home with parents or relatives, while 62 percent had enrolled their children in a public or private center-based

preschool. A far smaller number (31 percent) arranged for child care in a non-family member's private home, while 18 percent turned to a licensed family childcare home.⁶

Survey responses point to a correlation between parents' education levels and their choice of early care environments for their children. Exhibit 11 shows that 69 percent of parents with more than a high school education reported that their child attended preschool, while 56 of parents who did not graduate high school made this same choice.

Location of child care prior to kindergarten

Exhibit 11	Time Spent Prior to Kindergarten	Parent Education Level (Percentage)			
		Countywide	Less than high school	High school or equivalent	More than high school
	Home with his/her parent or other relative (n=1,688)	81.5	94.7	90.7	83.0
	Public or private center- based preschool (n=1,521)	50.6	55.8	61.4	69.0
	Someone else's home under someone else's care (n=1,339)	22.2	31.7	28.8	31.0
	Licensed family child care home (n=1,271)	12.6	13.9	16.3	25.1

*Percentages do not add to 100 as survey respondents were instructed to select all applicable responses.

⁵ While it has been shown that the quality of early care and education environments relates to children's readiness to enter kindergarten, the family survey did not include questions about perceived quality of care.

⁶ Findings add up to more than 100 percent because respondents were asked to identify all that apply.

Family Services and Information: Where Parents Turn for Support

One of the long-term goals of F5MC is to facilitate linkages between parents with young children who need access to appropriate services, support, and resources in Monterey County. In compiling the 2009 KRA, we were particularly interested in discovering which F5MC-funded services parents relied on most.

Countywide, the most commonly accessed service was parenting classes (15 percent). Once again, we found that level of education was a factor in service utilization by parents (see Exhibit 12). Specifically, 17 percent of parents who reported having more than a high school education brought their children to organized playgroups, while nine percent of parents with less than a high school level of education did the same. These findings concur with previous studies conducted among Monterey County parents on use of playgroups.⁷

We also asked parents how they tend to access information about child health and family services. Countywide responses revealed the top three sources to be health clinics (57 percent), Women, Infants and Children (WIC) Clinics (46 percent), and family or friends (36 percent). Previous studies have shown that children of families who receive food, nutrition supplements, and parenting education from WIC have a lower incidence of developmental delays. This reaffirms the vital role that WIC

Clinics may play in the kindergarten readiness of Monterey County's most vulnerable children.⁸ Exhibit 13 shows resources for family services and information and compares access by parent education level.

Conclusion: Persistent Trends, Room for Improvement

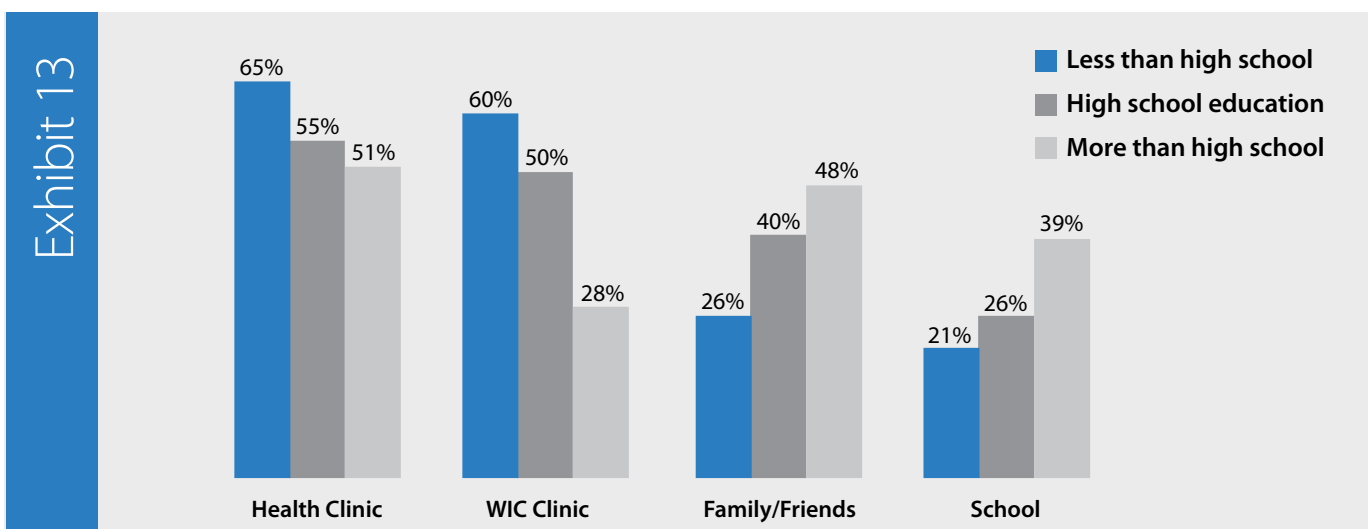
When we compared findings from the 2006 KRA with those from 2009, it was clear that parents in Monterey County still do not spend as much time reading with their children as needed. Studies have long proven that reading has one of the single greatest impacts on a child's readiness for school. Parents do, however, spend far more time watching television or videos with their young children, an activity that has not been shown to benefit school readiness.

The 2009 KRA also showed consistently that parents with higher levels of education enroll their children in preschool and attend playgroups more frequently than parents with lower levels of education. These findings suggest that extending information and resources to parents who have less than a high school education may have a positive impact on the future school readiness of Monterey County's youngest children.

Utilization of services by parents education level

Exhibit 12	Type of Service	Countywide	Parent Education Level (Percentage)		
			Less than high school	High school or equivalent	More than high school
	Parenting classes (n=1,657)	14.7	14.7	14.3	15.0
	Health education fair or event (n=1,633)	12.0	11.9	12.7	12.5
	Organized playgroup (n=1,630)	12.0	9.4	10.1	16.9
	Home visiting program (n=1,636)	8.4	11.2	8.2	4.8

Resources for child health and family services by parent education level



7 First 5 Monterey County 2008-09 Parent Interview Report.

8 Children's Healthwatch Policy Action Brief, *WIC Improves Child Health and School Readiness*, January 2010.

How Educators Help: Paving the Way for School Success

What Educators Suggest Parents Do

Below are the top three activities educators recommend for parents seeking to prepare their young children for kindergarten:

1. Read to your child.
2. Spend time playing with your child.
3. Help your child learn by engaging in active exploration.

Children in preschool and kindergarten spend much of their day in the company of early childhood educators and kindergarten teachers. Understandably, these educators play a pivotal role in preparing children for success in school. A total of 187 educators participated in the 2009 KRA, including 87 early childhood educators and 100 kindergarten teachers. More than three-fourths (77 percent) of the kindergarten teachers surveyed speak at least one other language in addition to English, compared to 23 percent of their early childhood educator peers. Earlier studies have indicated that early educators who have a Bachelor's Degree are better equipped to prepare children for kindergarten.⁹ Interestingly, the assessment found that 40 percent of kindergarten teachers in low-performing schools had a graduate degree compared with 18 percent of teachers in high-performing schools. Among the 87 early childhood educators, approximately 30 percent had attained a Bachelor's Degree or higher, and just over half had earned their Associate's Degree or another two-year degree.

Teacher training by skill area

Exhibit 14	Early Childhood Educators		Kindergarten teachers	
	Received	Desired	Received	Desired
Children or families from cultural backgrounds different from your own	40.0%	85.9%	45.4%	52.1%
English language learners	43.6%	74.3%	89.0%	68.4%
Children with disabilities and other special needs	40.8%	86.7%	42.4%	80.2%
Kindergarten transition	31.0 %	86.5%	18.8%	68.8%

Tools for Teaching: Gaining the Skills to Support Young Students

Before educators can successfully support their students, they need to be supported themselves. Today's educators need and want specialized training in how to work most effectively with children from diverse cultural backgrounds, children with special needs, and English language learners. These are just some of the tools educators seek to guide young children through the transition into kindergarten.

In Exhibit 14, we outline the percentages of early childhood educators and kindergarten teachers who received and desired training in four skill sets. With the exception of kindergarten teachers who received training in teaching English Language Learners (89 percent), fewer than half of the educators surveyed were trained in any of the four skill sets. More than 70 percent of early childhood educators want more training in all four areas, and 87 percent requested training related specifically to kindergarten transition. Among kindergarten teachers, 80 percent said they would like more training in working with special needs children. When we analyzed results based on school performance ratings, we found that kindergarten teachers employed by low-performing schools had a greater desire for training than their colleagues in higher-performing schools.

⁹ Bueno M, Darling-Hammond L, and Gonzales D., *A Matter of Degrees: Preparing Teachers for the Pre-K Classroom*. The PEW Center of the States, Education Reform Series, March 2010.

Developmental Domains: What Matters Most for Kindergarten Readiness

A child's success in the first year of school is closely tied to their mastery of four developmental domains. Both early childhood educators and kindergarten teachers observed that the relative importance of these domains changes before and after kindergarten. As Exhibit 15 illustrates, social and emotional well-being is seen as the most important skill both upon entering and exiting kindergarten. Kindergarten teachers believed that the second most important domain upon entering kindergarten was communication skills, while cognition and general knowledge is ranked second by the time a child exits kindergarten.

Ranking of developmental domains

Exhibit 15	Kindergarten Teachers Survey (n=100)		Early Childhood Educators (n=87)	
	Rank	Most Important Skills Upon Entering Kindergarten	Most Important Skills Upon Exiting Kindergarten	Most Important Skills Upon Entering Kindergarten
1	Social and Emotional Well-Being	Social and Emotional Well-Being	Social and Emotional Well-Being	Social and Emotional Well-Being
2	Communication Skills	Cognition and General Knowledge	Communication Skills	Cognition and General Knowledge
3	Approaches to Learning	Approaches to Learning	Approaches to Learning	Communication Skills
4	Cognition and General Knowledge	Communication Skills	Cognition and General Knowledge	Approaches to Learning

Teaching Practices: Beliefs About What Works Best for Preschool Children

When it comes to teaching practices, beliefs held by individual teachers can greatly influence the environment in which young children have their first learning experiences. Both early childhood educators and kindergarten teachers strongly support practices such as self-discovery, play, and socialization that promote a child's social and emotional development. These educators were less supportive of practices that prescribed rules for how a child should learn, such as working silently at their seats, and teaching each subject at a separate time. A great majority of kindergarten teachers agreed that their students should learn to form letters and color "within the lines" as structured activities. Educators were asked to "agree" or "strongly agree" with the teaching practices and their responses are ranked on Exhibit 16.

Preferred teaching practices for preschool children

Exhibit 16	Early Childhood Educators (n=87) "Agree/Strongly Agree"		Kindergarten Teachers Survey (n=100) "Agree/Strongly Agree"	
	Practice	Percentage	Practice	Percentage
	Children should be encouraged to play	98.9%	Children should be encouraged to socialize with other children	99.0%
	Children should learn through active explorations	97.7%	Children should be encouraged to play	93.0%
	Children should be encouraged to socialize with other children	96.5%	Children should learn through active explorations	91.9%
	Children should be allowed to select many of their own activities from a variety of prepared learning areas	95.3%	Activities should be responsive to individual differences in development	90.0%
	Activities should be responsive to individual differences in development	91.8%	Children should learn to form letters correctly on a printed page	85.0%
	Children should be instructed in recognizing the single letters of the alphabet, isolated from words	38.4%	Children should learn to color within predefined lines	68.7%
	Each curriculum area should be taught as a separate subject at separate times	36.9%	Children should be instructed in recognizing the single letters of the alphabet, isolated from words	67.6%
	Children should learn to form letters correctly on a printed page	26.8%	Children should be allowed to select many of their own activities from a variety of prepared learning areas	52.0%
	Children should learn to color within predefined line	18.8%	Each curriculum area should be taught as a separate subject at separate times	20.2%
	Students should work silently and alone on seatwork	9.2%	Students should work silently and alone on seatwork	13.1%

Pre-Reading and Language Development: The Building Blocks of Reading and Writing

Educators can make a positive contribution to the future school success of children by engaging them in a range of pre-reading and language development activities. Survey responses indicated that early childhood educators engage preschool children by reading books aloud in English and engaging in meaningful conversation. While kindergarten teachers regularly engaged in reading and writing activities with their students, “reading books in English” was not a frequent activity countywide. However, only kindergarten teachers at low-performing schools reported that they frequently read books in Spanish and used both English and Spanish words with their students. Exhibit 17 lists the five most common pre-reading and language development activities reported by educators.

Preschool to School: Kindergarten Transition Activities for Educators

Early childhood educators and kindergarten teachers are ideally positioned to facilitate transition into kindergarten. When we presented educators with a list of kindergarten transition for educators, we found that early childhood educators engaged in more transition activities than kindergarten teachers. The top two activities reported by early childhood educators were “practice kindergarten skills” (93 percent) and “provide information on kindergarten to parents” (72 percent). Among kindergarten teachers, 80 percent incorporated time for open exploration or play, and 73 percent attended kindergarten information night for parents. However, fewer than half of all kindergarten teachers surveyed engaged in any of the other transition activities for their whole class. Exhibit 18 compares how often activities were implemented by early childhood educators and kindergarten teachers for their entire class.

Top five pre-reading and language activities

Exhibit 17	Early Childhood Educators (n=85) “3+ Times per Week”		Kindergarten Teachers (n=99) “3+ Times per Week”	
	Read books in English	91.8%	Practice letter recognition	100%
	Engage in meaningful conversation during self-initiated activities	90.5%	Write own name	100%
	Listen to adult/teacher use common prepositions, such as over and under, up and down	83.4%	Work on phonics	99.0%
	Children listen to you read stories where they see the print (e.g., Big Books)	81.4%	Write the letters of the alphabet	94.0%
	Practice letter recognition	80.0%	Discuss new words	93.9%

Kindergarten transition activities implemented for the whole class

Exhibit 18	Activities Implemented by Early Childhood Educators		Activities Implemented by Kindergarten Teachers ¹⁰	
		Done for whole class		Done for whole class
	Practice kindergarten skills (n=83)	92.8%	Incorporate time for open exploration and/or play into my curriculum (n=80)	80.0%
	Provide information on kindergarten to the parents in my program (n=81)	71.6%	Attend kindergarten information night for parents (n=99)	72.7%
	Other kindergarten transition activities (n=64)	64.1%	Other kindergarten transition activities (n=44)	47.7%
	Conduct home visits with children in my early care and education setting (n=83)	47.0%	Meet with families of enrolled children prior to start of school year (n=99)	42.4%
Share portfolios or records of children in my program with kindergarten teachers (n=81)	46.9%	Read portfolio or records of children in preschool (n=94)	35.4%	
Arrange for my class to visit a kindergarten class (n=81)	46.9%	Participate in the schools’ kindergarten early registration event (n=99)	35.4%	

10 Other transition activities implemented by kindergarten teachers include the following: meet with families individually during the start of school; discuss expectations for transition with early childhood educators; engage in regular meeting with preschool teachers to discuss continuity in the curriculum between preschool and kindergarten; visit preschool classes; participate in a summer bridge program; meet with preschool teachers to discuss placement of children in kindergarten; and other kindergarten transition activities.



Children with Special Needs: Disparities Among Low- and High-Performing Schools

When kindergarten teachers respond effectively to students with special needs, it is a strong indicator that they are also supporting the potential of all their students. For the 2009 KRA, we asked teachers to rate how well their schools were addressing the conditions and concerns of children with special needs. As shown in Exhibit 19, it is apparent that these concerns are more of a challenge at low-performing schools. For example, only 36 percent of low-performing schools indicated that the concerns of special needs children have been observed or evaluated, compared with 64 percent of high-performing schools.

Conclusion: Ample Agreement, Clear Opportunities

Surveys from the 2009 KRA clearly indicated that educators understand and appreciate the importance of fostering social and emotional well-being in their young students. Furthermore, they regularly engage in teaching practices designed to encourage development in this vital developmental domain. Our assessment also revealed that most early childhood educators take time for daily reading with children. Most kindergarten teachers and early childhood educators indicated a desire for more training. Findings clearly suggest that children will benefit if schools adopt a more formal approach to implementing kindergarten transition activities and ensuring training.

Addressing concerns of children with special needs

Exhibit 19		Countywide (n=185)	Low API (n=151)	Medium API (n=23)	High API (n=11)
	Discussions/plans in progress	53.0%	51.0%	52.2%	81.8%
	Specialist contacted	43.2%	40.4%	65.2%	36.4%
	Modifications or accommodations to classroom or activities	42.7%	38.4%	60.9%	63.6%
	Child has been observed or evaluated	39.5%	36.4%	47.8%	63.6%
	Meeting with parents and special needs team	26.5%	21.2%	47.8%	54.5%
	IEP or IFSP developed	24.9%	17.9%	65.2%	36.4%
	Don't know	1.6%	1.3%	4.3%	0.0%

What Influences Children: Connecting Early Childhood Experiences

Even before children enter preschool or kindergarten, their experiences at home and in their communities do much to set the stage for early learning. In this chapter, we take a closer look at how the relationships in children’s lives can influence their readiness for school. More specifically, we examine the relationship between data reported on family surveys, and developmental competencies of children measured in the 2009 Modified Desired Results Developmental Profile (MDRDP) observations.

Predictors of School Readiness: Continuing Trends and New Findings

Our 2009 assessment reinforced findings from the 2006 KRA, which showed that parents’ education level and child gender were leading predictors of school readiness. Once again, the 2009 KRA found that parents who frequently read to their children and enroll them in preschool have a profoundly positive influence on school readiness. New findings that came to light in 2009 match recent research in early education: children who participate in three or more kindergarten transition activities and who master social and emotional skills are more ready for school and experience an easier transition into kindergarten.

Factors associated with school readiness

Exhibit 20	Consistent in 2006 & 2009	New in 2009
	Parent’s level of education	Three or more kindergarten transition activities
	Frequent reading to children	Social and emotional well-being
	Preschool attendance	
	Kindergarten transition rating	

Note that only findings that were strongly significant are included in the 2009 KRA and the report does not include variables that do not appear to have a statistically significant impact on school readiness, such as race and income.

Supporting Social and Emotional Well-Being

In the 2009 KRA, four factors were closely associated with social and emotional well-being, including:

- Parents’ Education Level ($p < .001$).¹¹ Children whose parents had more than a high school education were more likely to master social and emotional skills.
- Child Gender ($p < .001$). Girls were more likely than boys to master social and emotional skills.
- Kindergarten Transition Rating ($p < .001$). Children whose parents reported an easy transition to kindergarten were more likely to master social and emotional skills.
- Quantity of Kindergarten Transition Activities ($p < .05$).¹² Children were more likely to master social and emotional skills when their parents participated in three or more kindergarten transition activities.

Two additional factors were found to be closely associated with mastery of social and emotional skills, both of which had an interactive relationship with parent education level. These included:

- Preschool Attendance ($p < .001$). Children whose parents had more than a high school education and enrolled their child in preschool were more likely to master social and emotional skills.
- Reading to a Child ($p < .001$). Children whose parents had more than a high school education and read to their child three or more times per week were more likely to master social and emotional skills.

Variables associated with social and emotional well-being

Exhibit 21	Independent variables	Strength of association (p-value)
	Parent’s level of education	$p < .001$
	Child gender	$p < .001$
	Kindergarten transition rating	$p < .001$
	Three or more kindergarten transition activities	$p < .05$

¹¹ Most of the findings included in this section were significant at the “ $p \leq .001$ level.” In other words, there is less than a 0.1 percent probability that findings in this section were due to chance alone.

¹² This is the only finding in this section that was significant at the “ $p \leq .05$ level.” In other words, there is less than a 5 percent probability that findings in this section were due to chance alone.

Supporting Communication Skills

The 2009 KRA identified five factors that were independently associated with communication skills among children, including:

- *Parent's Level of Education (p<.001)*. Children whose parents had more than a high school education were more likely to master communication skills.
- *Child Gender (p<.001)*. Girls were more likely than boys to master communication skills.
- *Language(s) Spoken at Home (p<.001)*. Children whose parents reported speaking English only at home were more likely to master communication skills.
- *Kindergarten Transition Rating (p<.001)*. Children whose parents reported an easy transition to kindergarten were more likely to master communication skills.
- *Quantity of Kindergarten Transition Activities (p<.001)*. Children were more likely to master communication skills when their parents participated in three or more kindergarten transition activities.

Two additional factors were linked to mastery of communication skills, but not independently. These two factors were:

Reading to a Child (p<.001). Children were more likely to master communication skills if their parents read to them three times a week and reported one of the following characteristics:

- *Had more than a high school education.*
- *Spoke more than one language or only English at home.*
- *Rated their child as having an easy transition to kindergarten.*

Preschool Attendance (p<.01).¹³ Children were more likely to master communication skills if their parents sent them to preschool and reported one of the following characteristics:

- *Had more than a high school education.*
- *Spoke more than one language or only English at home.*
- *Rated their child as having an easy transition to kindergarten.*

Variables associated with communication skills

Exhibit 22	Independent variables	Strength of association (p-value)
	Parent's level of education	p<.001
	Child gender	p<.001
	Language(s) spoken to child at home	p<.001
	Kindergarten transition rating	p<.001
	Three or more kindergarten transition activities	p<.05



Supporting Positive Approaches to Learning

Findings from the 2009 KRA included the following three factors that were strongly associated with mastery of skills within the domain of positive approaches to learning:

- *Parent's Level of Education (p<.001)*. Children whose parents had more than a high school education were more likely to develop positive approaches to learning.
- *Kindergarten Transition Rating (p<.001)*. Children whose parents reported an easy transition to kindergarten were more likely to develop positive approaches to learning.
- *Quantity of Kindergarten Transition Activities (p<.001)*. Children were more likely to develop positive approaches to learning when their parents participated in three or more kindergarten transition activities.

Reading to a child was the only other factor associated with mastery of positive approaches to learning, but not independently:

- *Reading to a Child (p<.01)*. Children were more likely to master positive approaches to learning if their parents read to them at least three times a week and:
- *Had more than a high school education; or*
- *Reported their child as having an easy transition to kindergarten.*

Variables associated with positive approaches to learning

Exhibit 23	Independent variables	Strength of association (p-value)
	Parent's level of education	p<.001
	Kindergarten transition rating	p<.001
	Three or more kindergarten transition activities	p<.05

¹³ This is one of the two findings in this section that was significant at the "p<.01 level." In other words, there is less than a 1 percent probability that findings in this section were due to chance alone.

Supporting Cognition and General Knowledge

A child's ability to master skills associated with cognition and general knowledge is closely associated with the same factors that influence social and emotional well-being, namely:

- *Parent's Level of Education* ($p < .001$). Children whose parents had more than a high school education were more likely to master cognition and general knowledge skills.
- *Child Gender* ($p < .001$). Girls were more likely than boys to master cognition and general knowledge skills.
- *Kindergarten Transition Rating* ($p < .001$). Children whose parents reported an easy transition to kindergarten were more likely to master cognition and general knowledge skills.

Variables associated with cognition and general knowledge

Exhibit 24	Independent variables	Strength of association (p-value)
	Parent's level of education	$p < .001$
	Child gender	$p < .001$
	Kindergarten transition rating	$p < .001$



Supporting Comprehensive Readiness

For the 2009 KRA, we analyzed the extent to which children almost or fully mastered all four developmental domains associated with kindergarten readiness as defined in the MDRDP. Across the board, parent education level, child gender, and kindergarten transition rating were the three factors found to have the most influence on a child's comprehensive achievement. It is noteworthy that children who had mastered social and emotional skills prior to entering kindergarten were far more likely to demonstrate comprehensive readiness of MDRDP kindergarten readiness skills. In fact, 92 percent of children who exhibited overall mastery on the MDRDP also showed mastery of social and emotional well-being. Parent participation in three or more kindergarten transition activities also appeared to influence comprehensive readiness.

Variables associated with comprehensive readiness

Exhibit 25	Independent variables	Strength of association (p-value)
	Parent's level of education	$p < .001$
	Child gender	$p < .001$
	Kindergarten transition rating	$p < .001$
	Social and emotional well-being	$p < .001$
	Three or more kindergarten transition activities	$p < .01$

Emerging Indicators of School Readiness in Monterey County

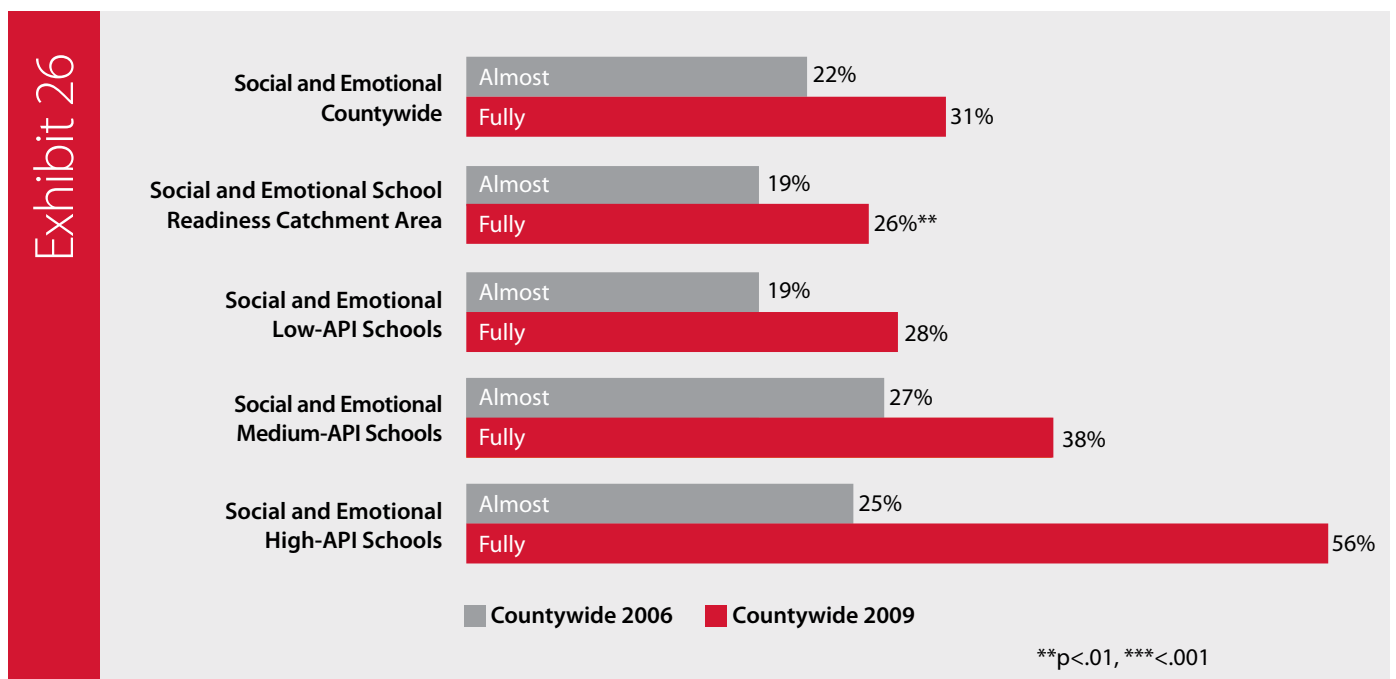
Social and Emotional Well-Being: The Cornerstone of School Readiness

Evidence has been building over time that highlights the importance of social and emotional well-being in children. Findings from the 2009 KRA add further weight to this evidence. Children who feel socially and emotionally secure interact more readily with peers and adults, ask for help when needed, and are better able to control their emotions. Social and emotional competence is often associated with higher achievement in other areas, including cognitive skills.

Although there is still ample room for improvement, the 2009 assessment found that children throughout Monterey County have made significant gains since the 2006 assessment in mastering skills associated with social and emotional well-being, regardless of school performance level (API). Moreover, as illustrated by Exhibit 15, early childhood educators and kindergarten teachers agreed that social and emotional well-being is the single most important factor in how well children do upon entry into – and exit from – kindergarten.



Children’s mastery of social and emotional well-being



Kindergarten Transition Activities: Participation in Three or More Tips the Scale

Findings from the 2009 KRA clearly point to the pivotal role of parents and schools in preparing their young children for school. While none of the seven kindergarten transition activities listed on the Family Survey were individually associated with school readiness, parent participation in *three or more* activities had a significant influence on three of the four school readiness domains as well as overall mastery.

As shown in Exhibit 27, parents who reported that their child participated in three or more kindergarten transition activities were more likely to have enrolled their child in preschool and to have rated their child's transition to kindergarten as "easy." Contrary to other findings, level of parent education was not associated with participation in kindergarten transition activities. Among the 58 percent of parents who participated in three or more kindergarten transition activities, the top three activities they reported were:

1. Touring the school and/or visiting a kindergarten classroom.
2. Receiving a letter or written information from school.
3. Meeting with school principal or other staff.

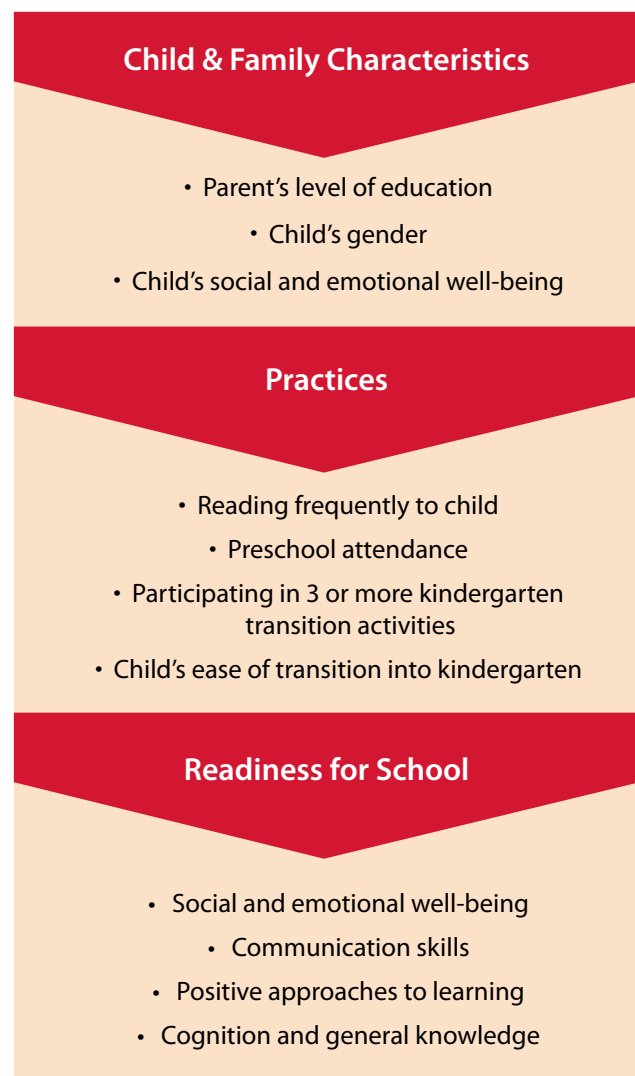
Variables associated with participation in 3+ kindergarten transition activities

Exhibit 27	Independent variables	Strength of association (p-value)
	Preschool attendance	p<.001
	Ease of kindergarten transition	p<.01

Six Key Factors Influencing Kindergarten Readiness in Monterey County

When one considers the data and key findings in both the 2006 and 2009 KRA, it is apparent that the factors influencing kindergarten readiness in Monterey County are consistent with research in early education and early childhood development. The top six factors influencing school readiness are:

1. Parents have completed high school or more.
2. Parents believe their children transitioned easily into kindergarten.
3. Parents read books or tell stories to their children.
4. Children have already attended preschool.
5. Children experience social and emotional well-being.
6. Families take part in three or more kindergarten transition activities.



As illustrated above, these factors can and should be used as guidelines when targeting future messages and services aimed at promoting best practices for school readiness.

Recommendations

The 2009 F5MC Kindergarten Readiness Assessment – the third report since 2004 – is the only assessment of its kind that monitors changes over time that impact school readiness in Monterey County. Today, F5MC is the only dedicated source of funding for children ages 0-5 in the County. This report serves as a rich source of ideas and information for anyone interested in nurturing the future potential of our County’s most valuable resource: our children. However, the true value of this assessment is not in how it increases knowledge, but in whether it inspires action. Below, we offer recommendations (in no particular order) for ways in which parents, early childhood educators, kindergarten teachers, school personnel, and the F5MC Commission can put the findings of the 2009 KRA into practice.

Recommendations for Parents

- 1. Read with your child every day.** Numerous studies have shown that reading with young children has more impact on school success than any other single activity. Despite this fact, the 2009 KRA found that reading is the one activity that parents do least. If you are a parent, take time to read with your child every day, from infancy to the first day of kindergarten and beyond.
- 2. Enroll your child in a quality preschool.** The 2009 KRA further validated the fact that preschool is one of the best investments any parent can make in their child’s future. If you have not yet enrolled your child in a quality preschool, explore the options available for your child in Monterey County.
- 3. Participate in at least three kindergarten transition activities.** Take an active role in making your child’s transition into kindergarten as smooth as possible. Our 2009 assessment shows that if you participate in three or more kindergarten transition activities (see Exhibit 10) your child will reap the benefits.
- 4. Take time to play with your child.** Early childhood educators and kindergarten teachers agree that social and emotional well-being is the most important developmental domain for a child to master upon entering and exiting kindergarten. Strengthen your child’s development in

this crucial area by playing games, engaging in projects together, and encouraging shared play with other children their age.

- 5. Nurture the social and emotional well-being of your child.** In the timeframe between the 2006 and 2009 KRA, children in low-performing schools made significant gains in the vital domain of social and emotional well-being. Continue to encourage ongoing development of related skills in your child’s classroom. This assessment shows that children who master social and emotional skills are far more likely to develop competency across all school readiness domains.

Recommendations for Early Childhood Educators and Administrators

- 1. Encourage parents to read to their children daily.** The 2009 KRA data affirmed that reading to children is the activity most often recommended to parents by both early childhood educators and kindergarten teachers. In fact, 100 percent of early childhood educators in the assessment told parents they should read to their children at home. Make sure parents of your students hear this recommendation from you – early and often. Instill more confidence in parents by sharing techniques you’ve used successfully in the classroom for reading, so they can apply those ideas with their children at home.
- 2. Continue to read to children in your early care and education setting.** The 2009 KRA found that reading is one of the primary activities that influence a child’s readiness for school. Support the efforts of parents at home by making sure children are read to in your early care and education setting as often as possible.
- 3. Invite parents to participate in at least three kindergarten transition activities.** In the months leading up to the start of the kindergarten school year, be sure to keep parents informed about all the kindergarten transition activities taking place at local elementary schools and elsewhere. Remind parents that participation in three or more of these activities will have a far greater impact on their child’s school readiness than any one transition activity alone.
- 4. Collaborate closely with kindergarten teachers.** Cultivate the ongoing exchange of ideas and information with kindergarten teachers and school personnel in your community. Collaborative relationships among early

childhood educators and kindergarten teachers strengthen teaching and learning.

5. **Provide early childhood educators with training and ample resources.** In surveys educators expressed a desire for more training. Support your early childhood educators by providing them with access to the training and resources they want and need.

Recommendations for Kindergarten Teachers and School Personnel

1. **Keep reminding parents to read to their children on a daily basis.** The 2009 KRA data showed that 99 percent of kindergarten teachers already recommend this vital activity to parents of their students. Remind parents often to read at home with their child: it is one of the most important contributions they can make to their child's success in school.

2. **Offer parents a wide choice of kindergarten transition activities.** It is clear from the 2009 KRA that children whose parents participate in three or more kindergarten transition activities are more likely to be ready for school. Contribute directly to school readiness by making sure that your school institutionalizes these four activities used most often by parents with lower levels of education: (1) offer tours of the school; (2) invite parents to visit kindergarten classrooms; (3) send low-literacy letters and written information to parents' homes; and, (4) arrange meetings between parents and the school principal or other staff (see Exhibit 18).

3. **Keep supporting the social and emotional well-being of your students.** Data from the 2009 KRA demonstrated that kindergarten teachers and early childhood educators agree that social and emotional well-being is the most important developmental domain for children to master before entering and exiting kindergarten. In fact, children who master this domain early are more likely to demonstrate competency across all school readiness domains. In compiling the latest KRA, we were encouraged to see significant gains made in this area between 2006 and 2009. Now, we recommend that you continue on this path, particularly if you work at a low-performing school.

4. **Collaborate closely with early childhood educators.** Each year, incoming kindergarteners at your school arrive with a range of learning and behavioral habits developed in their early care environments. Maintain open lines of communication and exchange ideas with early childhood educators in your community: they are paving the way for the success of your future students!

5. **Provide teachers with special needs training and ample resources.** In teacher surveys collected for the 2009 KRA, more than 80 percent of teachers at low-performing schools expressed a desire for special needs training. Yet these concerns continue to be addressed at a far lower rate at low-performing schools than at medium- and

high-performing schools. Support your teachers by providing them with access to the training and resources they want and need.

6. **Encourage discussion of teaching beliefs among early childhood educators and kindergarten teachers.** The 2009 KRA confirmed that both early childhood educators and kindergarten teachers support practices that promote social and emotional development. However, their teaching beliefs are not always aligned. By encouraging educators to examine how and why their teaching beliefs differ, you can help to inform greater articulation of teaching and learning practices that affect children before and after kindergarten entry.

Recommendations for First 5 Monterey County

1. **Partner with Women, Infants and Children (WIC).** Both the 2006 and 2009 KRA found that a large proportion of parents of young children in Monterey County rely on WIC for access to information on child health and family services. National studies have shown that families who receive WIC services have children with a lower incidence of developmental delays. Given these compelling facts, we strongly recommend that F5MC partner with WIC, as they play a critical role in ensuring that our County's children enter school ready to maximize their potential.

2. **Publicize the importance of kindergarten transition activities.** It is abundantly clear from the 2009 KRA that children whose parents participate in three or more kindergarten transition activities do better in school. F5MC is in the ideal position to take the lead in promoting participation in these activities by partnering more closely with early childhood educators and elementary schools. By investing in efforts to increase access to kindergarten transition activities – and by publicizing their availability – F5MC will have an ongoing positive impact on school readiness in our County.

3. **Continue to support efforts to provide quality, affordable early care and education.** Findings from the 2009 KRA align with national research which points to the benefits of having quality early care providers. F5MC has embraced a significant role in this by investing in the professional development of early childhood educators and providers in Monterey County. Still, there is much work to be done. Going forward, F5MC can and should champion public policy efforts aimed at increasing the number of free or affordable slots available in quality preschools.

4. **Continue to support early childhood literacy.** Since their inception, KRAs have pointed out the enduring benefits of reading to children prior to kindergarten. Now, F5MC can take further steps to ensure that

currently funded programs continue to promote the importance of early reading, and to facilitate access to developmentally appropriate books and early literacy resources.

5. Continue to promote the vital role of social and emotional well-being. The 2009 KRA confirmed that social and emotional competence increases a child's chance for overall success in school. It is encouraging that many of the countywide programs and initiatives supported by F5MC focus on improving the social and emotional well-being of children, and it is hoped that F5MC will continue to promote these efforts.

6. Provide access to special needs training and appropriate resources for educators. In the 2009 KRA, more than 80 percent of teachers at low-performing schools expressed a desire for special needs training. Despite this, special needs concerns are addressed at a far lower rate at low-performing schools than at medium- and high-performing schools. To correct this disparity, we recommend that F5MC emphasize special needs training, particularly in the County's low-performing schools.

7. Promote collaboration among kindergarten teachers and early childhood educators. The early childhood educators and kindergarten teachers of Monterey County have a direct and ongoing influence on how well our County's children do before, during and after kindergarten. The 2009 KRA sheds light on opportunities for improved collaborations among these educators, and we encourage F5MC to facilitate ever-stronger relationships that allow educators to discover commonalities and differences in their teaching beliefs and practices.



Acknowledgements

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We owe a special debt of gratitude to the 100 kindergarten teachers who participated in this assessment, despite multiple and competing demands. They administered over 1,800 surveys to incoming kindergarteners and encouraged nearly the same amount of parents to complete family surveys. Their professionalism and flexibility, as well as their commitment to educating Monterey County's youth, made it possible to collect a representative sample of incoming kindergartners.

ALISAL UNION SCHOOL DISTRICT

- Bardin Elementary School
- Creekside Elementary School
- César E. Chávez Elementary School
- Fremont Elementary School
- Dr. Oscar F. Loya Elementary School
- Jesse G. Sanchez Elementary School

GONZALEZ UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

- La Gloria Elementary School

GRAVES - MONTEREY COUNTY OFFICE OF EDUCATION

- Graves Elementary School

MONTEREY PENINSULA UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

- Highland Elementary School
- Del Rey Woods Elementary School
- Foothill Elementary School
- Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. School
- Walter Colton Elementary School

NORTH MONTEREY COUNTY UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

- Echo Valley Elementary School
- Elkhorn Elementary School
- Prunedale Elementary School

PAJARO VALLEY UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

- Hall Elementary School
- Ohlone Elementary School

SALINAS CITY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL DISTRICT

- Boronda Meadows Elementary School
- Los Padres Elementary School
- University Park Elementary School
- Mission Park Elementary School
- Henry F. Kammann Elementary School
- Loma Vista Elementary School

SAN ANTONIO UNION SCHOOL DISTRICT

- San Antonio School

SANTA RITA UNION SCHOOL DISTRICT

- McKinnon Elementary School

SOLEDAD UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

- Gabilan Elementary School
- Jack Francioni Elementary School

F5MC and Harder+Company are also grateful for the expert guidance provided by the F5MC Evaluation Advisory Committee during the planning, execution, and analysis of the study.

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Finally, we acknowledge the participation of parents of incoming kindergarteners in Monterey County who completed the family survey. Their contribution gives voice to families with young children entering school throughout Monterey County.



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First 5 Monterey County supports community partnerships and programs that enhance the lives of children, from the prenatal stages through age 5, and their families.

Vision – All children reach their full potential in a family and community that values and respects childhood.

Mission – To serve as a catalyst to create sustainable change in systems, policies and practices that enrich the development of children in their FIRST 5 years of life.

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