

# READY

road to the early achievement  
and development of youth

## Sonoma County School Readiness Report 2018 – 19



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# Road to the Early Achievement and Development of Youth (READY)

Built on the premise that prevention focused policies and interventions have long-term impacts, the READY project is a unique cross-sector partnership focused on increasing access to quality early learning experiences and facilitating the transition of young learners from early childhood to kindergarten. READY is funded primarily by First 5 Sonoma County, with supplemental funding from the Sonoma County Office of Education (SCOE). READY is implemented by Sonoma County Health and Human Services Departments, 10 local school districts and numerous early learning partners. **Since 2013, the READY project has conducted ongoing background research to support the pilot and scaling of a common kindergarten readiness assessment in Sonoma County.** The school readiness assessment, the Kindergarten Student Entrance Profile (KSEP), is paired with a parent survey to gather information on early learning experiences and family activities of children entering kindergarten.

## What is School Readiness?

While there is debate among experts on the definition of school readiness, it can be broadly defined as **a set of social-emotional, self-regulation and academic skills a student requires to make a successful transition to kindergarten** (Snow, 2010). School readiness also includes the capacity of families, schools, early learning environments and the community to support children to be successful in school (NAEYC, 2017). Experts believe that a comprehensive definition of **school readiness includes a child's characteristics, as well as the influence of past and present environmental and cultural contexts** (Carlton & Winsler, 1999).

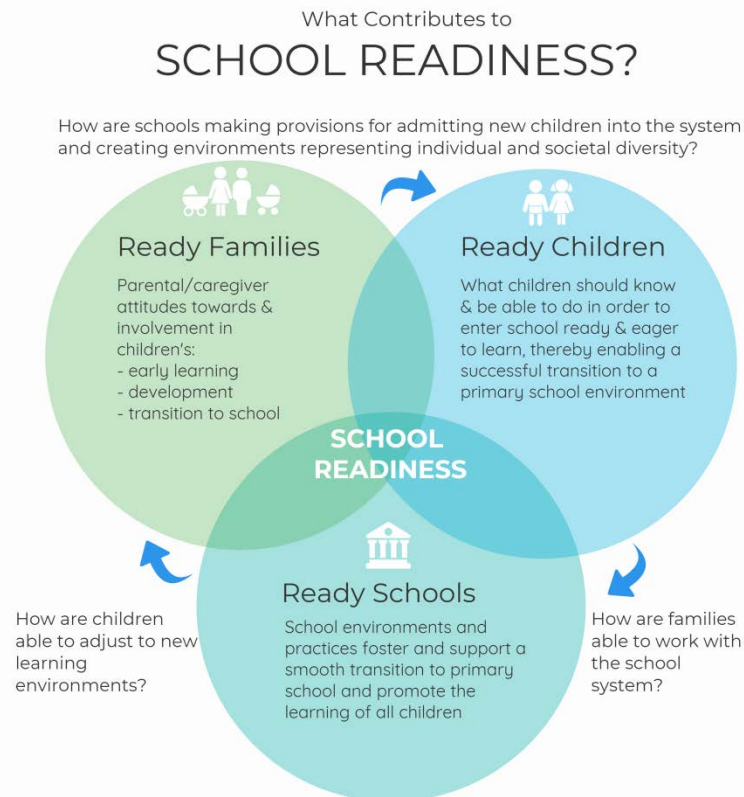
Research has found that a host of factors are both negatively and positively associated with how “ready” a child is to begin school. Socio-demographic risk factors in the first five years of life, such as poverty, single parenthood, parental depression and housing instability have been associated with poor school readiness outcomes (Pratt et al., 2016; Zioli-Guest, et al., 2014). These factors contribute to **a large achievement gap that appears early between low-income minority students and their peers from moderate to high income families.** Conversely, a large body of research has found that quality preschool programs (Schweinhart et al., 2004) and early literacy activities support school readiness, especially among low-income children for whom English is not their first language.



# What is School Readiness? Continued

This research points to the importance of early interventions, access to quality early learning experiences and the promotion of early literacy activities to support children from less-advantaged backgrounds to enter kindergarten with the necessary social-emotional, self-regulation and academic skills to succeed in school and in life. A lack of the aforementioned factors creates what is known as the **“opportunity gap”, the disparity in access to the resources needed for all children to be successful**. Closing the opportunity gap is the only way we will make progress toward closing academic achievement gaps that separate our most economically disadvantaged minority students and their more affluent peers (Jackson, 2017).

Given the importance of early learning and the young age at which the achievement gap begins, there is increasing interest in implementing evidenced-based school readiness assessments to identify and address achievement gaps as early as possible, and to enhance the ability of schools and communities to provide the support necessary for children to succeed in school. **School readiness assessments can be important tools for school districts, early learning partners and education stakeholders when used in the manner in which they were designed** (Regenstein et. al, 2017).



# How Do We Measure School Readiness?

The KSEP is a 12-item observational screening tool that gathers information about the social-emotional and academic domains of school readiness. During the first four weeks of the school year, teachers observe and rate a child's proficiency across the items (e.g., engages in cooperative play or recognizes shapes) using the following rating categories: Not Yet (1), Emerging (2), Almost Mastered (3), Mastered (4). The KSEP item ratings are then totaled to calculate an overall KSEP score, which corresponds to one of four KSEP rating categories:

**Not Yet Ready/Immediate Follow-Up Recommended (12-24):** These students are at high risk and their developmental needs should be evaluated in more depth.

**Emerging Ready/Monthly Monitoring Recommended (25-35):** Teachers should keep track of students from October to December to see if they make a satisfactory adjustment to kindergarten.

**Almost Ready/ Quarterly Monitoring Recommended (36-43):** Teachers should use their districts' current Fall, Winter and Spring progress monitoring procedures to keep track of these students.

**Ready-to-Go (44-48):** These students experience a smooth transition into kindergarten. Teachers should follow-up as needed with these students and monitor progress using standard district benchmark assessments.

## Don't Forget!

It is important to note that the KSEP is one measure used to approximate a child's development at a single point in time. Development is an uneven process that is unique for each child. Ideally, the KSEP should be paired with other school/district tools that track a child's growth and development over time.



## How Are School Readiness Observation Tools Used?

- 1) **Adapt teaching practices** at the school level and ensure schools are well-designed to meet the needs of their incoming kindergarten students.
- 2) **Support early learning and kindergarten classrooms** in developing closer connections and aligning their curriculum to best meet the needs of their students.
- 3) **Inform the continuous quality improvement of early learning programs** by incorporating assessment information into their improvement practices.
- 4) **Support teacher-parent partnerships** by sharing with families what is known about the child's school readiness and how the parent can support the child's learning needs from home.
- 5) **Inform policy decisions** about early learning resources and systems.



# 10 Participating School Districts



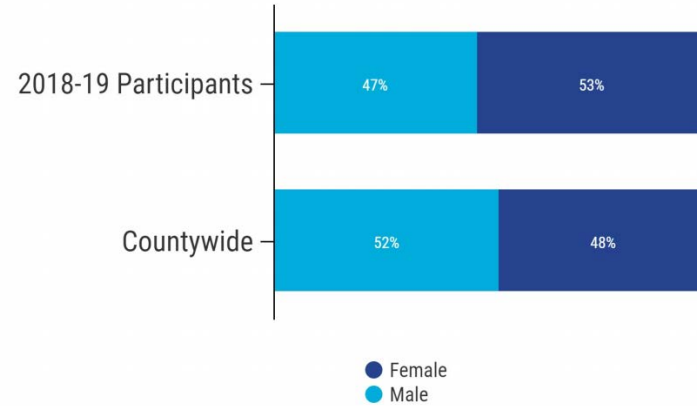
Approximately **1 out of 4** kindergarteners in Sonoma County participated (1,505 out of 6,275, with 970 parent surveys completed)



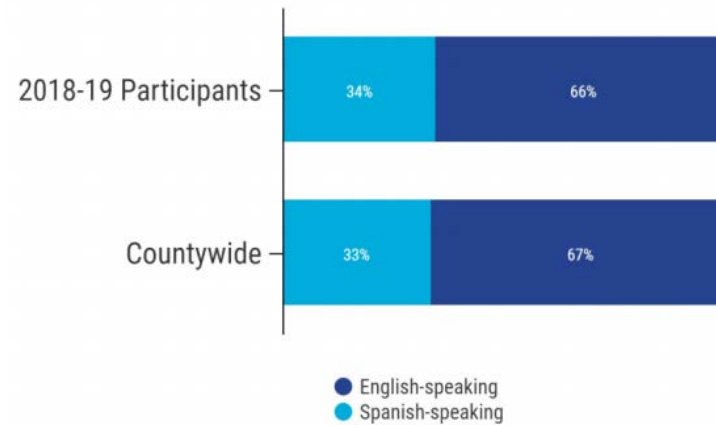


# The basic demographic characteristics of 2018 participants are closely matched to the demographics of all Sonoma County kindergarten students.

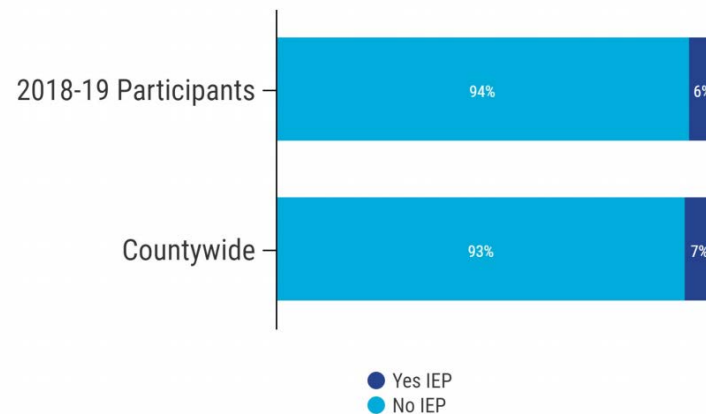
## Gender



## Home Language

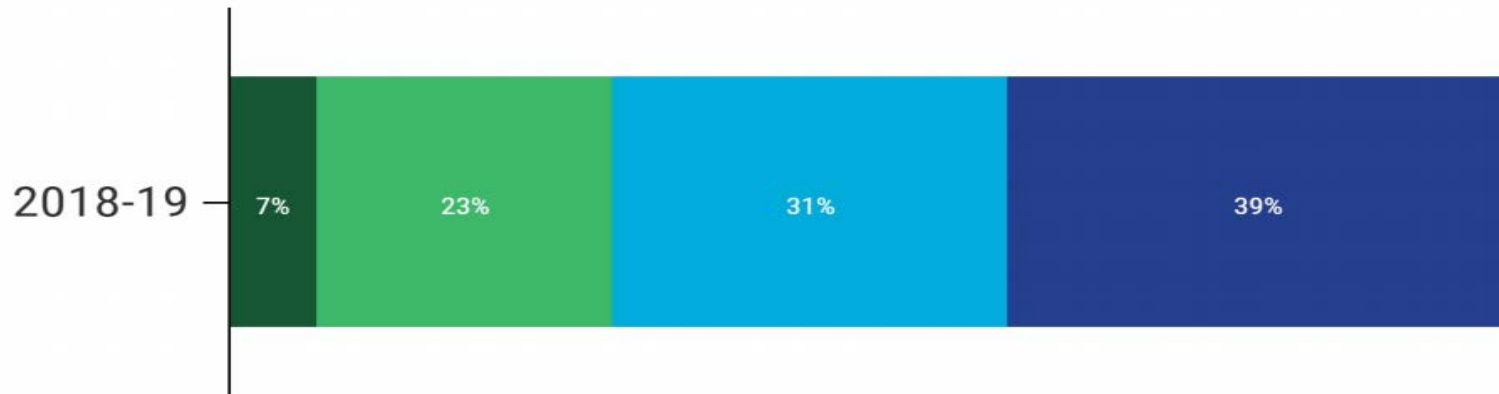


## Special Education Enrollment (IEP)



In 2018-19, **2 out of 5 students were Ready to Go** when they entered Kindergarten.

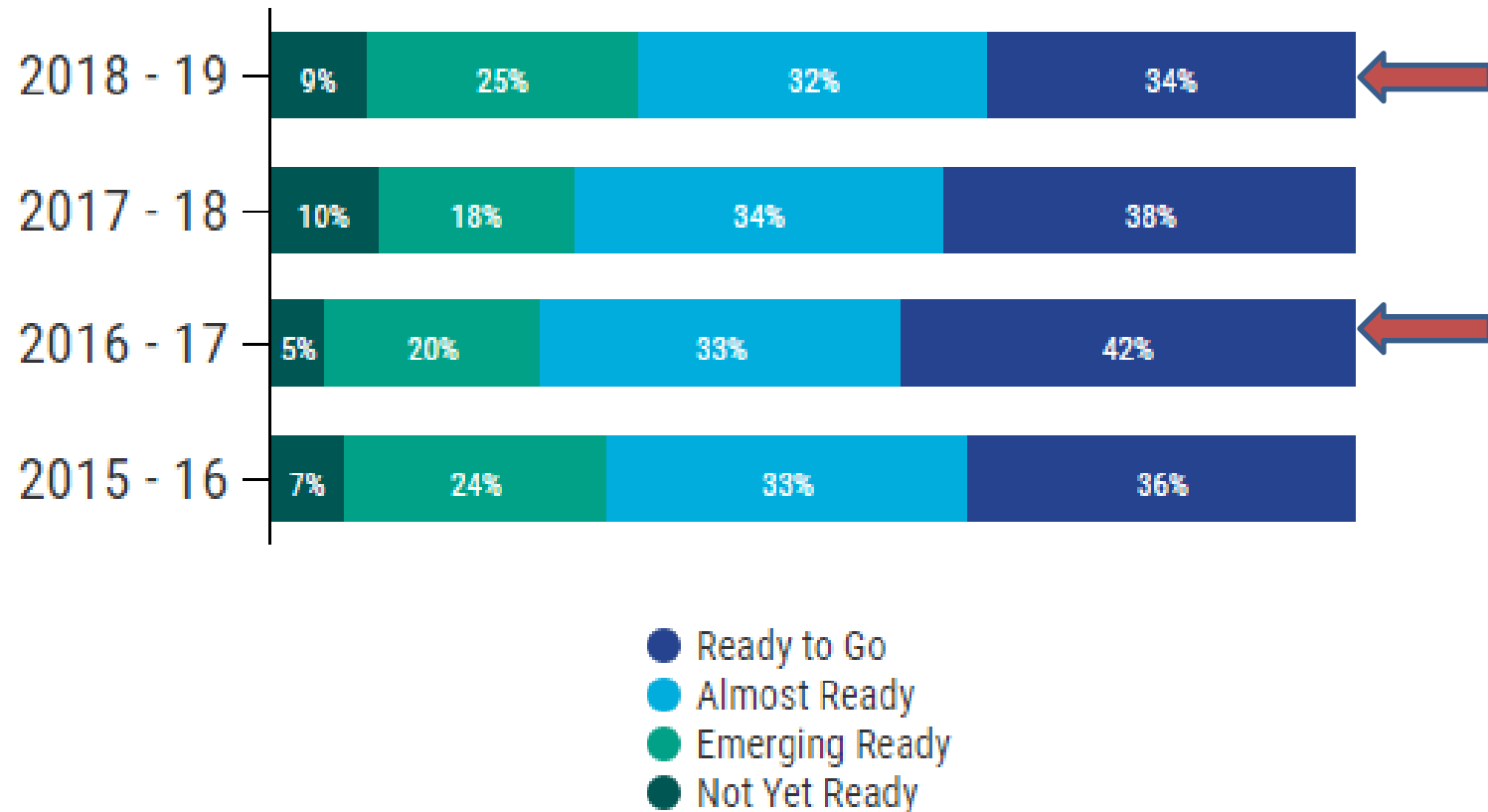
However, **7 out of 10 were Ready or Almost Ready to Go.**



- Ready to Go
- Almost Ready
- Emerging Ready
- Not Yet Ready

**KSEP 2018-19 Data**

## Between the 2016-17 and 2018-19 School Year Readiness Levels Decreased 8 Percentage Points.



This 4 year analysis includes **only the original schools and districts that began participating in 2015-16**. In order to compare multiple years, we must make sure that the populations match up per year. In 2019-20, we will be able to conduct a more robust longitudinal analysis with the schools and districts added in 2016-17.

# What Impacts School Readiness?



## Parental Education

Higher parental education is a proxy for income and higher socioeconomic status, and is associated with increased school readiness

**Action:** Expand accessible, affordable adult education to promote an inter-generational cycle of success



## Early Learning Attendance

Attending quality, licensed preschool, child care or transitional kindergarten programs is associated with increased school readiness

**Action:** Expand quality, affordable early learning programs for children ages 0-5



## Special Needs

Children with special needs often score lower on school readiness assessments

**Action:** Implement developmental screening & intervention as early as possible



## Reading at Home

Reading to young children, signing songs and storytelling aloud is associated with increased school readiness

**Action:** Promote culturally appropriate early literacy activities



## Home Language

While speaking multiple languages is an asset, dual language learners often score lower on school readiness assessments



## Gender

Female children often score higher on school readiness assessments



## Age

Older children often score higher on school readiness assessments

# Key Findings: Factors That Impact School Readiness

## Early Care and Education (ECE)



**87% of children attended an early learning program** such as preschool, transitional kindergarten and/or licensed home-based childcare before entering kindergarten, for an **average duration of 16 months**. Children who attended an early learning program were **two times more likely to enter school Ready to Go,\*** compared to children who did not attend an early learning program.\*

## Reading



**27% of parents read to their child 5 or more days a week** for an average duration of 24 minutes. Children who were read to 5 or more days per week were over **two times more likely to enter school Ready To Go,\*** compared to children who were read to two or fewer days a week.\*

## Learning Activities



Children whose parents engaged them in **5 or more early learning activities in the home** in the past 30 days (such as telling a story, completing crafts together, singing songs, playing games with numbers or letters, etc.) were **1.5 times more likely to enter school Ready to Go\*.**

## Screen Time



Children whose parents **limited their screen time to 1 hour or less** per day were **2 times** more likely to enter school **Ready to Go.\***

\*Statistically significant finding at  $p < .01$

### Opportunity Gap Spotlight

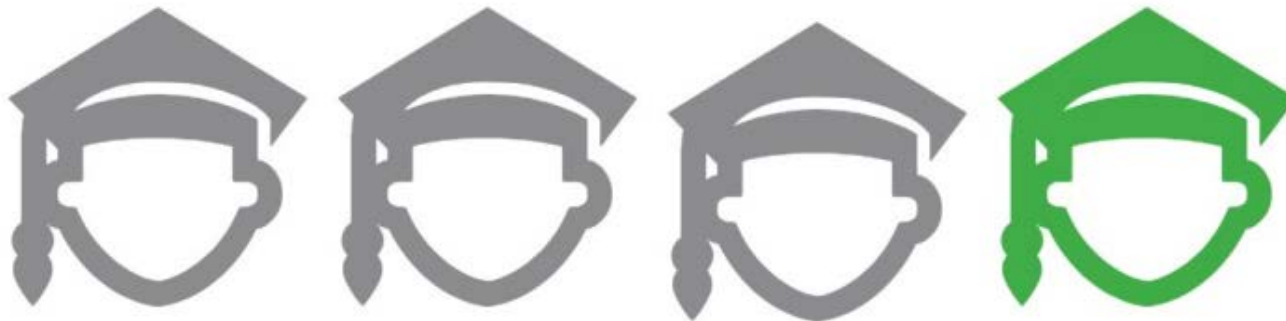
**90% of children from English-speaking homes attended an ECE, for an average of 19 months**

**79% of children from Spanish-speaking homes attended an ECE, for an average of 11 months**

## 2018 Equity and Readiness Findings

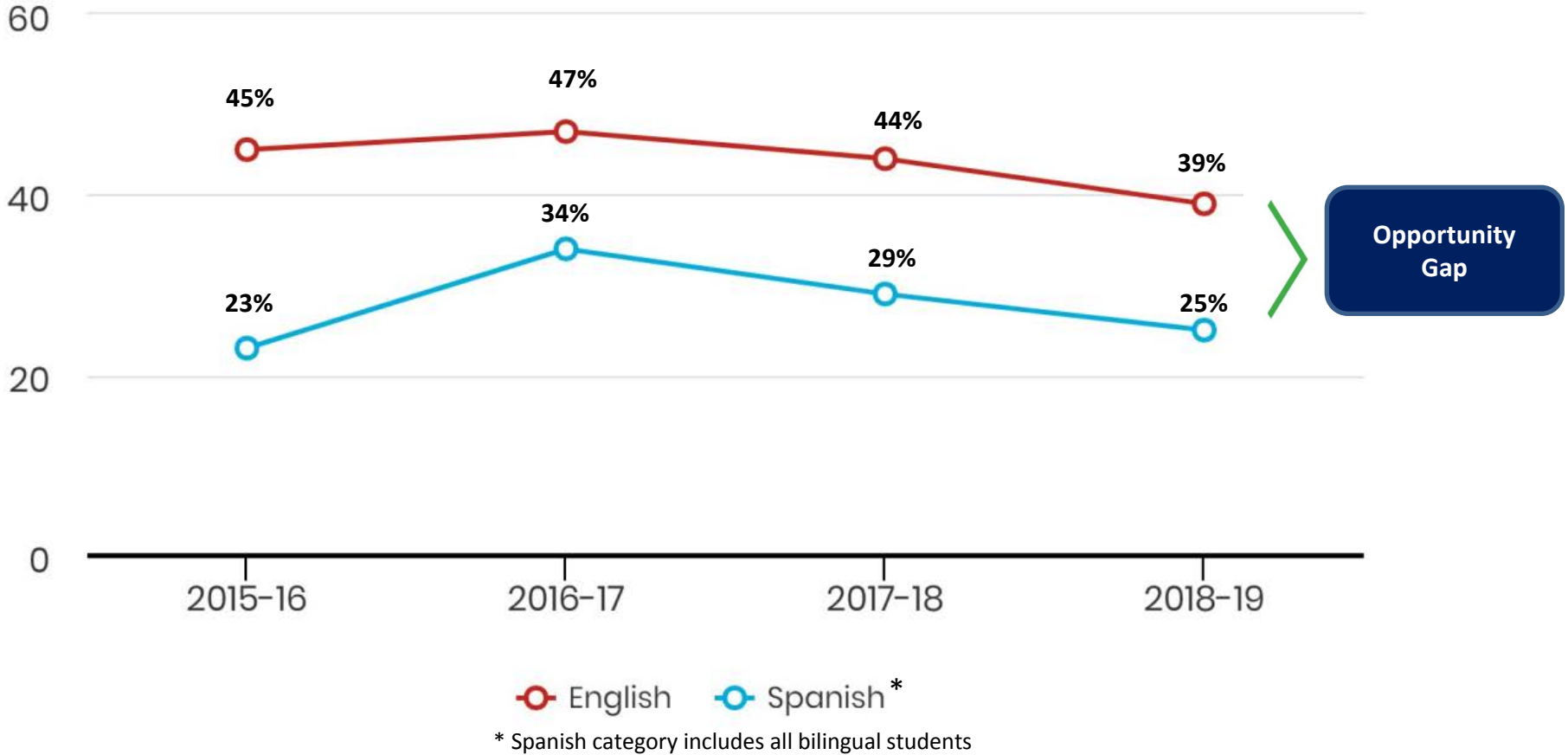


Nearly **2 out of 4 English-speaking** students are **Ready to Go** compared to **1 out of 4 Spanish-speaking\*** students who are **Ready to Go**.



\* "Spanish" category includes all bilingual students

**Closing the opportunity gap** is the only way we will make progress toward **closing academic achievement gaps** that **separate** our most economically disadvantaged and **Spanish speaking** students from their affluent **English speaking** peers.



### 4 Year Analysis of School Readiness and Home Language

\*Note-Despite the opportunity gap, **Spanish speaking students' school readiness has increased 2% since the 2015-16 school year**

# What is Preventing Children from Attending Early Care and Education (ECE)?



35%

Hours did not meet my needs



19%

ECE was not available



19%

ECE was not affordable



27%

Did not want care outside of home



The majority of reasons children did not attend ECE are related to access and the opportunity gap. The ECE delivery system must be addressed in order to impact these reported barriers.

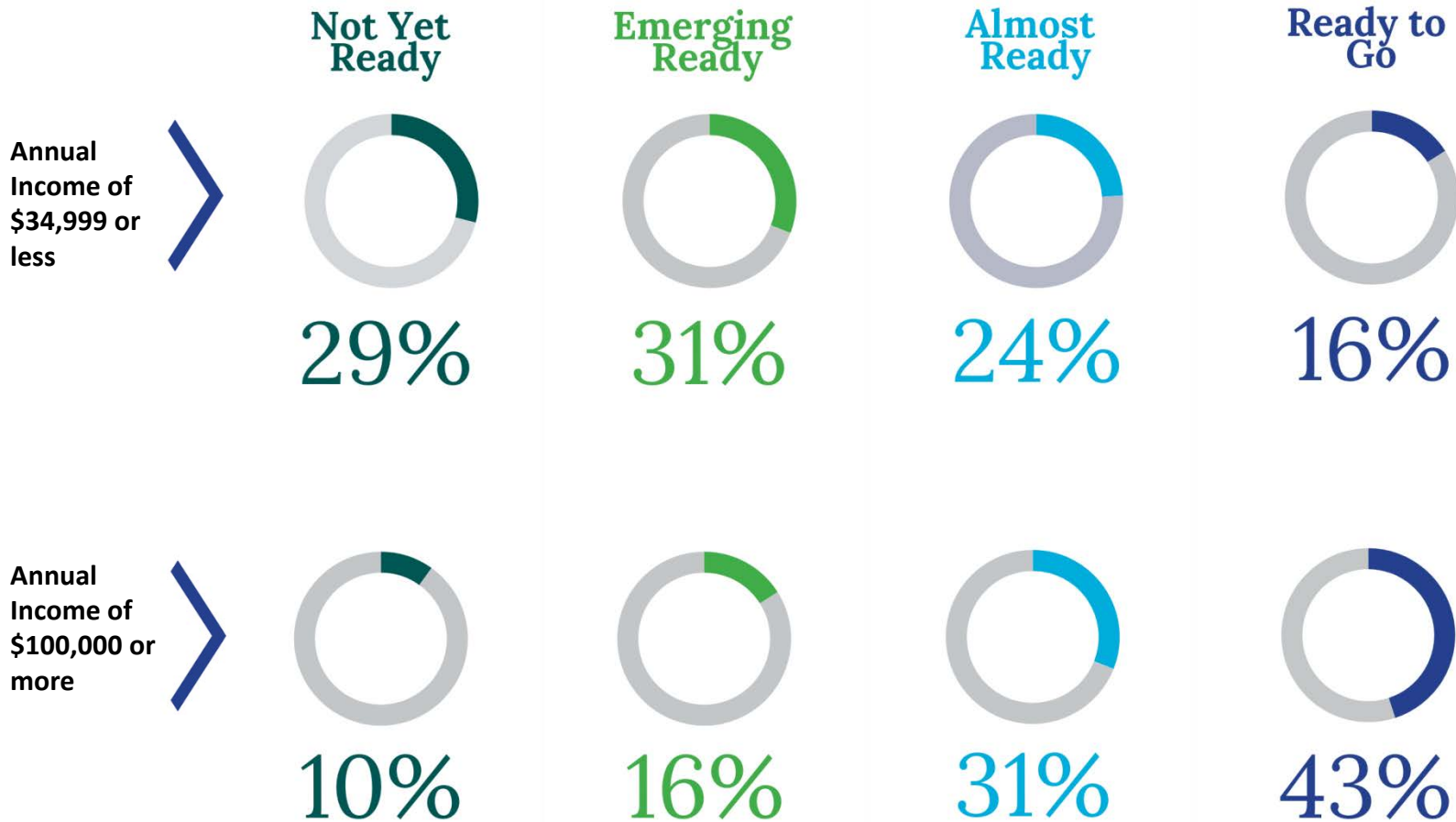


This reason creates an opportunity for community education regarding the impact ECE has on school readiness.

Parents were able to select multiple options, these numbers reflect the top four factors preventing ECE attendance.



Children whose annual family income is **\$100,000 or more** are **over 2 times more likely to enter Kindergarten Ready to Go** when compared to children whose annual family income is \$34,999 or less.



Analysis of participating families' annual income revealed that **43% of English-speaking families earn \$100,000 or more** while only **4% of Spanish-speaking families earn the same**.

Meanwhile, 49% of Spanish-speaking families earned \$34,999 or less compared to 19% of English-speaking families.

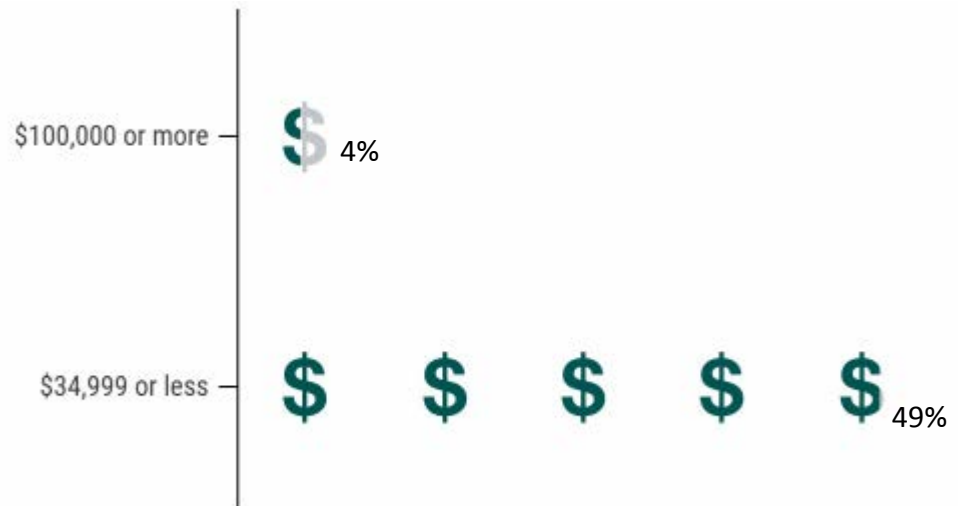
Socio-demographic risk factors in the first five years of life, such as poverty and housing instability, have been associated with poor school readiness outcomes. These factors contribute to a large achievement gap that appears early between low-income minority students and their peers from moderate to high-income families.

The Federal Poverty Level (FPL) annual income for a family of 4 is \$25,750. However, the FPL does not take into account the local cost of living. Instead, we use the Self Sufficiency Income Standard as this more accurately reflects the actual annual income needed for a family to be self sufficient in Sonoma County. The Sonoma County Self-Sufficiency Income (SSI) Standard for a family of 4 is \$83,536 (Retrieved from: <https://insightcced.org/2018-family-needs-calculator>).

### English-speaking Families' Annual Income



### Spanish-speaking Families' Annual Income



# What is Happening?

## 7 out of 10 Districts had lower KSEP scores than the previous year

*"We are recognizing an increase of social and emotional needs from our youngest students which can interfere with their learning."*

-Phyllis Parisi,  
Superintendent, Forestville  
Union School District

*"This year's cohort is less prepared socially and emotionally and we have been experiencing an increase in transition and behavior challenges."*

-Stephanie Feith,  
Healdsburg Unified School  
District

*"With this year's cohort of students, we are seeing an increase in social and emotional behavior challenges. We are also observing challenges with students' resiliency and coping strategies."*

-Susan Yakich, Principal,  
Cloverdale Unified School  
District

**More analysis is needed** to determine contributing factors to the decrease in KSEP scores. **Environmental factors** such as the 2017 Sonoma County Wild Fires, **social factors** such as the local housing crisis, and **political factors** such as changing Federal immigration policies, i.e. travel bans and the repeal of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) Program, may be contributing factors.



# What's New with Data Collection?



Generated QR code and added to parent surveys to improve access and increase return rates



Added 60+ age category to parent surveys to capture older adult caregiving data



Developed 2017 Firestorm impact & housing security parent survey question



Included ECE access question in Burbank Housing survey

## Have you:

- A. Been evicted from your residence
- B. Lost housing/residence for other reason
- C. Lived at a shelter, in a hotel/motel, in an abandoned building, or in a vehicle
- D. Moved in with other people, even temporarily
- E. Been unable to afford to pay rent, mortgage, or bills
- F. Lost access to your regular transportation (e.g. vehicle totaled or repossessed)
- G. Been unemployed or unable to find work
- H. None of these apply to me

Please indicate which of your responses were a result of the 2017 Sonoma County Firestorm

# What's New with Stakeholders?



Cradle to Career (C2C) alignment:

- Presentation to C2C Operations Committee
- **Recruit** partners to develop READY Steering Group supporting C2C Goal 1: Every child enters kindergarten ready to succeed



**Promote** best practices and data-driven decision-making to support decision makers and leaders



Launch Community Outreach campaign to **educate community about the importance of ECE**



Early August ECE and Kindergarten Provider Exchange Event in partnership with Quality Counts:

- “Get Your Classroom Ready for Back to School” with classroom resources offered
- **Support providers** as they facilitate students’ transition into kindergarten
- Strengthen relationships between ECE and Kindergarten providers in efforts to **articulate and coordinate activities that support school readiness**
- **Provide the space for attendees to learn** about successes and challenges within our community regarding school readiness
- **Review local data**, learn about best practices and **conduct action planning** for the upcoming year

# What is the Plan Moving Forward?

## Needs Assessment

To best understand the needs of the community, during the 2018-19 school year READY staff conducted key informant interviews with representatives from participating Districts, ECE providers and SCOE. In addition, a literature review and best practice research were conducted. The results were compiled and analyzed, and guided the development of the new READY 2019-21 work plan.

## In-depth Data Analysis

For the first time in Sonoma County, school readiness data is available for students who are now in 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> grades. These data enable READY staff to conduct longitudinal analyses in order to examine the varying factors contributing to school readiness in Sonoma County. During 2019-2021, an in-depth multivariate analysis will be conducted on factors including, but not limited to:

- Equity trends, barriers, and protective factors
- 2<sup>nd</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> grade reading levels of READY students
- KSEP readiness categories and impacting factors, e.g., cognitive skills vs. socio-emotional skills and behaviors
- Impact of dosage of ECE, e.g., length of day, 3 hrs. vs. 8 hrs., number of days, 2 days vs. 4 days
- Relationship between last 2 readiness categories, Ready to Go and Almost Ready

## Sustainability

In addition, READY staff will leverage shared data agreements with community partners in order to conduct analysis of additional early learning programs and their impact on school readiness, e.g. AVANCE, Pasitos. Lastly, READY staff will continue to engage in sustainability-building activities and leverage First 5 and SCOE investments. In 2019, the READY Initiative applied for the Bold Upstream Integrated Local Data-Driven (BUILD) Health Challenge funding opportunity.



# Evaluation Methods

**Purpose:** The purpose of the Fall 2018 evaluation was to gather and analyze data through the common kindergarten readiness assessment and parent surveys to reach roughly one-quarter of all Sonoma County kindergarten students and their families, and to conduct more detailed analysis on the early learning experiences of incoming kindergarten students.

**Sample:** In Fall 2018, 10 school districts, 30 schools, 78 kindergarten teachers, 1,505 kindergarten students and 973 parents chose to participate in the assessment of school readiness. Participation was open to all Sonoma County Elementary School Districts. The READY project prioritized outreach to districts on the First 5 Focus Schools list. First 5 Focus schools contain a high percentage of English language learners, foster youth, and free/reduced lunch eligible students. The READY project also prioritized outreach to districts that would provide geographic representation with a mix of urban and rural schools.

## Data Collection Instruments

**Kindergarten Student Entrance Profile (KSEP):** The central instrument of the common kindergarten readiness assessment is an evidenced-based, kindergarten readiness screening tool called the KSEP. Developed in 2004 as part of a University, school and community-action research collaboration in Santa Barbara, the KSEP is a 12-item observational screening tool that gathers information about the social-emotional and academic domains of school readiness. The KSEP includes content consistent with the essential school readiness indicators proposed by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the National Governor’s Task Force on School Readiness. Research has found that the KSEP significantly predicts second grade student achievement, whereby 60% of students from disadvantaged backgrounds (high percentage of English Language Learners and low-income students) rated Ready to Go at kindergarten entry are reading at grade-level in second grade, compared to only 7% of students rated as “Immediate Follow-up” (Quirk et al., 2012).

**Parent Survey:** The parent survey gathers demographic information, early intervention and early learning experiences of participating children entering kindergarten. The parent survey was adapted from a survey developed and validated by a research and evaluation firm in the San Francisco Bay area. Information from the parent survey is paired with KSEP ratings to better understand the early learning experiences of kindergarten students.



# Evaluation Methods Continued

## Data Collection Process

**School District Outreach and Contracts/Data Sharing Agreements:** Between February and June 2018, READY staff contacted Superintendents of school districts that expressed interest in participating in the Fall 2018 assessment of school readiness. Superintendents and other school administrators were provided with information about the READY project, the KSEP tool, the parent survey, data collection procedures and timelines. School districts that agreed to participate were offered a stipend for teachers' time to attend trainings and to conduct the KSEP. Superintendents signed a Memorandum of Understanding /contract with the County of Sonoma Human Services Department delineating roles, responsibilities, data sharing agreements and stipend amounts.

**KSEP Teacher Training:** Between July and August 2018, READY staff and an education consultant familiar with the KSEP conducted two-hour, in-person trainings for kindergarten teachers new to the KSEP. The trainings covered an overview of the READY project, detailed information on observing and rating students using the KSEP, data collection and data entry procedures, and parent survey administration. Teachers with previous KSEP experience were encouraged to watch a 45-minute recorded refresher training.

**Parent Survey Dissemination/Parental Consent:** The parent survey was available in English and Spanish. The survey was disseminated to school districts with a cover letter (also available in English and Spanish) explaining the purpose of the READY evaluation, how aggregate data would be used and how parents could opt-out of participating in the KSEP/parent survey by requesting an opt-out form from the main office. Schools and school districts then chose their preferred method to distribute parent surveys, which included disseminating the survey in kindergarten registration packets, handing out the survey during kindergarten registration nights, and/or sending the survey home with children in first day of school packets.

**Conducting the KSEP:** During the first three weeks of school, between August and September 2018, teachers observed their kindergarten students on the 12 KSEP items (six social-emotional and six school ready knowledge items). During the fourth week of school, teachers compiled their ratings for each student using the rating categories [*Not Yet (1), Emerging (2), Almost Mastered (3), Mastered (4)*] and entered KSEP data into the online, secure cloud-based APRICOT data system.





# Evaluation Methods Continued

**Data Analyses:** A total of 973 Parent Surveys were able to be matched with KSEP data. All others were excluded because the child did not attend school at one of the participating districts or parent survey data did not match with a KSEP rating record. SPSS statistical software was used for all statistical analyses. Child-level parent survey data were merged with KSEP rating data. Matched data were then extensively cleaned and additional variables were created to prepare for analyses. Select questions were analyzed descriptively, followed by a series of bivariate analyses using independent t-tests/Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) or chi-squared tests to analyze differences in means and proportions, respectively.

**Evaluation Limitations:** The following limitations should be taken into account when considering the implications of the evaluation findings described in this report.

- The 4-year trend analysis included only the original schools and districts that participated starting in 2015-16. Horicon and Rincon Districts were removed, as well as 9 out of the 11 schools in the Santa Rosa City Schools District. Only James Monroe and Steele Lane Elementary were included. In order to compare multiple years, the populations must be matched. In 2019-20, a new longitudinal analysis with the schools and districts added in 2016-17 will be conducted.
- Parent survey findings rely on self-reported data from parents that may be subject to “response bias” (when respondents are concerned what the evaluator will think, despite being assured their answers are confidential) or “poor memory/selective recall bias” (inability to accurately recall events and/or recalling more favorable events).
- The evaluation design enables exploration of patterns or correlations related to school readiness, but cannot determine which factors caused school readiness. One would need to implement a resource intensive evaluation with a randomized control group design to assess which factors caused school readiness.

