



Building Blocks For School Success

Findings From a 5-Year Longitudinal Study | Executive Summary: February 2013



First 5 San Joaquin's mission is to facilitate the development and implementation of a comprehensive, integrated system of early childhood development services for all children prenatal to five years of age. To achieve this mission, the Commission funds programs for children ages 0-5 and their families including preschool, playgroups, summer kindergarten bridge programs, family literacy, and information and referral services.

Overview

First 5 San Joaquin commissioned Harder+Company Community Research to conduct a five-year longitudinal evaluation study of the short- and long-term benefits of its School Readiness and Preschool programs including improved school readiness skills, increased parent involvement in their child's learning, and increased parent participation in home educational activities with their child. The School Readiness Longitudinal Study prospectively followed two cohorts of children; the School Readiness Cohort (SR Cohort), children who were 0 – 2 and enrolled in a First 5 School Readiness program at the start of the study, and the Preschool Cohort (PS Cohort), who were enrolled in a First 5 preschool at the start of the study. The desired sample size for the end of the study for each cohort was 225. For the SR Cohort, 188 participated in Year 5 and similarly, 190 for the PS Cohort. Participating school districts included Banta, Escalon, Jefferson, Lammersville, Lincoln, Linden, Lodi, Manteca, New Hope, New Jerusalem, Oak View, Stockton, and Tracy.

The following overarching questions guided this evaluation:

1. **School Readiness in the Home.** Do the parents of children attending a First 5 funded preschool or school readiness program increase their participation in home educational activities with their child?
2. **Family Involvement in School.** Do the parents of children attending a First 5 funded preschool or school readiness program increase their involvement in their child's learning?
3. **School-Based Outcomes.** Do children attending a First 5 funded preschool or school readiness program demonstrate improved school readiness skills?



Participant Characteristics

Since the start of the study, the SR and PS Cohorts exhibited notable differences in demographic and socioeconomic characteristics. These characteristics are important to highlight as research shows that they can be factors associated with a child's school success.

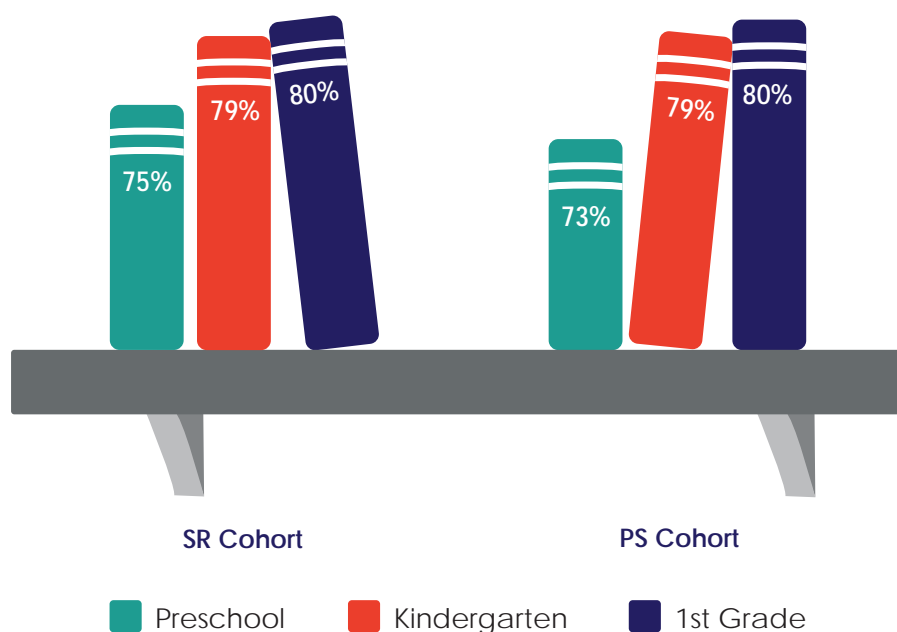
- Over three-quarters of children in the SR Cohort (77 percent) are Hispanic or Latino, followed by White (nine percent), Asian or Pacific Islander (seven percent), Multiracial (five percent), and Black or African American (2 percent). The PS Cohort was more ethnically diverse with 47 percent of children being Hispanic or Latino, 20 percent White, and 15 percent Multiracial.
- Thirty-nine percent of SR Cohort parents and 20 percent of PS Cohort parents reported having less than a high school education.
- The percentage of SR Cohort families living at or below the federal poverty level was 52 percent, compared to 38 percent of PS Cohort families.

School Readiness in the Home

First 5 San Joaquin families report high levels of participation in home-based educational activities.

Data related to parent participation in home learning activities shows that overall, First 5 families are frequently engaging with their child in a variety of educational activities, from playing with toys to playing games and reading together. Considering the demographic and socioeconomic differences between the two cohorts it is particularly noteworthy that the SR Cohort parents demonstrated overall higher levels of participation in parent-child activities in preschool, kindergarten, and 1st grade compared to the PS Cohort.

Percent of parents reporting reading to their child three days per week

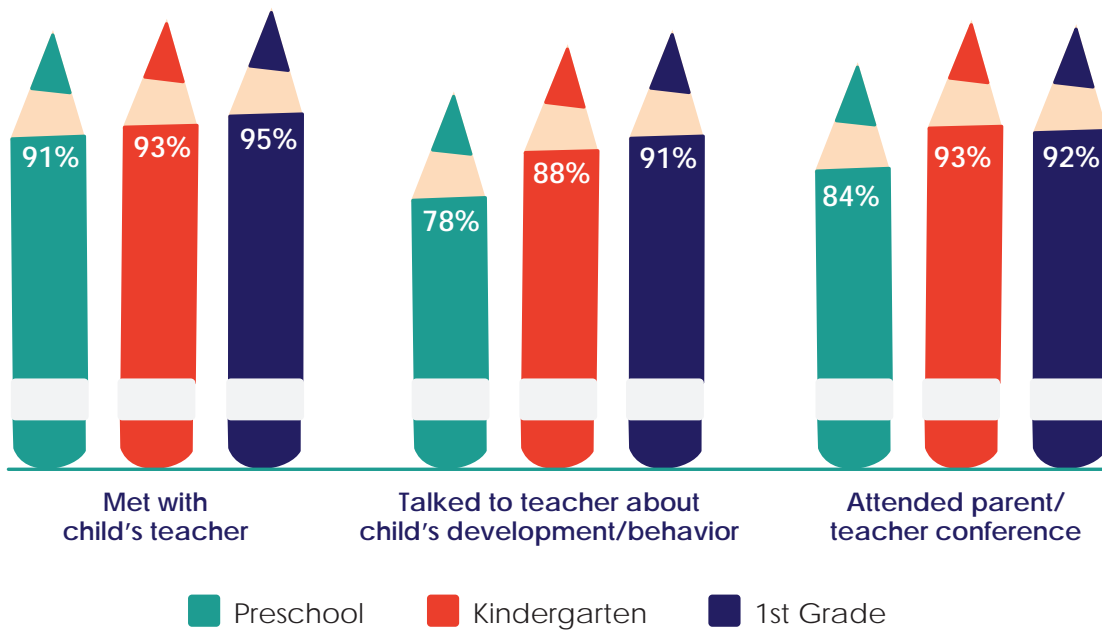


Family Involvement in School

Over the course of the study, First 5 San Joaquin parents became more involved in their child's school.

Data shows that parents were active in a range of school-based activities with the vast majority of SR and PS Cohort parents participating in activities where they engaged with their child's teacher, such as meeting with the teacher, talking to them about their child's development or behavior, and attending a parent-teacher conference.

Parent involvement in preschool, kindergarten and 1st grade



School-Based Outcomes

Five-year longitudinal findings show that preschool and positive social and emotional skills may be valuable for school readiness.

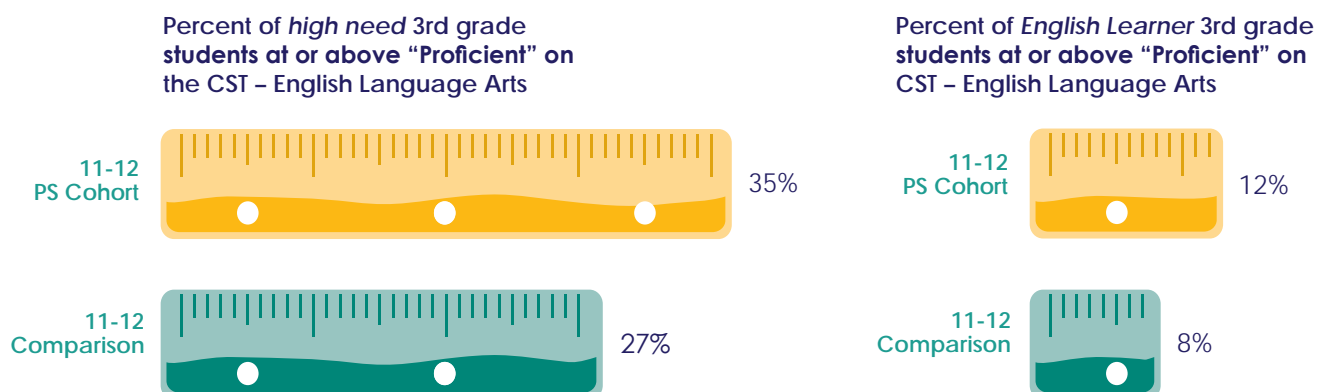
Data from this study show that although the SR Cohort showed the highest needs based on their socioeconomic characteristics, they demonstrated the greatest gains between preschool and kindergarten in their cognitive skills. Based on these findings it appears that two key factors for school readiness are preschool attendance and positive social and emotional skills.

Findings from school-based data obtained from school districts suggest that children who attended a First 5 preschool are performing better or at the same level than other students in several areas related to school success.

- Overall, children in the study appear to have benefitted from attending a First 5 preschool.
- Compared to children who did not attend preschool (Comparison Group), they have lower rates of absenteeism in school and lower overall rates of grade retention.
- Children who attended a First 5 preschool had better classroom performance based on teacher-reported grade reports in the areas of language arts and math compared to children who did not attend preschool (Comparison Group).
- On the California Standards Test (CST) the PS Cohort outperformed the Comparison Group and the County in the second grade and by the third grade, the PS Cohort and Comparison Group performed equally in English Language Arts (ELA) and the PS Cohort had a slight edge over the Comparison Group in math.

Children in special subgroups, including low-income children and children who are English Language Learners, appear to have benefitted the most from participating in a First 5 preschool program.

When looking at key subgroups, including students from low-income families who qualify for free/reduced priced meal participation and English Language Learners, they clearly outperformed similar students in the Comparison Group.



Recommendations

First 5 San Joaquin is dedicated to increasing access to quality early childhood education services and helping children and families have the knowledge, skills, and experiences necessary to succeed in school.

To do this, a multi-pronged funding approach is used which includes School Readiness and Preschool Funding Initiatives. The data in this report provides information on the short and long-term benefits of First 5 San Joaquin funded School Readiness and Preschool programs during 2007-2012. Based upon the research questions and data included in this report, we offer the following recommendations:

- Continue to incorporate activities into school readiness and preschool programs that encourage parent involvement in their child's education.
- Continue to focus on early intervention programs that target high need families with children ages 0-3.
- Increase efforts to target high need families for preschool programs.
- Emphasize the importance of learning and mastering positive social and emotional skills early to parents and early educators.





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