

GETTING CHILDREN AND FAMILIES READY FOR SCHOOL: THE FIRST 5 ALAMEDA COUNTY SUMMER PRE-K PROGRAM

BACKGROUND

In 2011, First 5 Alameda County (F5AC) commissioned Applied Survey Research (ASR) to conduct an assessment of the school readiness levels of new kindergarten students for the fourth consecutive year. The assessment includes four measurement instruments completed by teachers and parents of entering kindergarten students. Teachers indicate each of their students' proficiency levels on 24 readiness skills using an instrument called the *Kindergarten Observation Form*, and they report on how smoothly students had transitioned into kindergarten. Parents complete a survey in which they provide information about children's early care and family environments, as well as basic demographic and background information. Finally, teachers complete a survey about their beliefs related to children's readiness.

Across four years of data collected on entering kindergarten students throughout Alameda County, some consistent findings have emerged that have implications for students, parents, teachers, and school and district officials. One such set of findings relates to participation in a short-term readiness program offered by First 5 Alameda County (F5AC) called the Summer Pre-K (SPK) program.

WHAT IS THE F5AC SUMMER PRE-K PROGRAM, AND WHO ENROLLS?

The F5AC SPK program is a five-to-six week program for children with no prior preschool or licensed childcare experience. The program is designed to provide children with an opportunity to learn in a developmentally appropriate classroom environment and expose them to social experiences and develop various skills necessary for success in kindergarten. Parents and children are introduced to the school setting, easing the transition to kindergarten. Parent workshops are also provided through this program, as are developmental screenings if a teacher or parent sees a need for them.

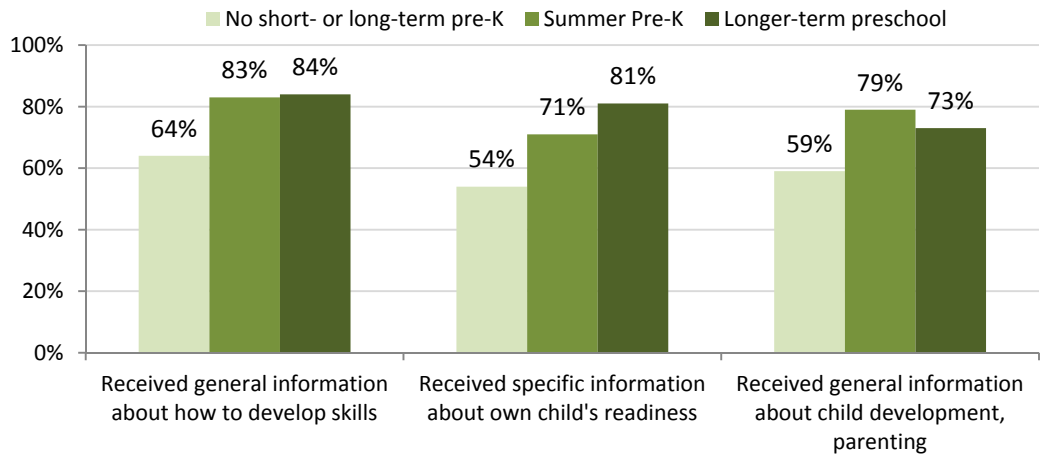
Consistent with its target population, the SPK program participants have demographic and background characteristics that are similar to those of students who have lower rates of (longer-term) preschool experience: many are from Hispanic/Latino backgrounds and/or are English Learners, and the students come from families with somewhat lower-than-average maternal education levels.

THE SPK PROGRAM IS ASSOCIATED WITH ENHANCED PARENT KNOWLEDGE AND BEHAVIOR RELATED TO READINESS

Findings suggest that the SPK program may promote readiness by guiding parents to engage in behaviors that will help their child be more prepared for school. Compared to parents of children with no pre-k exposure, parents of SPK students engage in more activities that help their child with the transition to kindergarten. These types of activities include things like working on school skills with their child, reading books or watching videos about kindergarten with their child, and visiting the school with their child, among other activities.

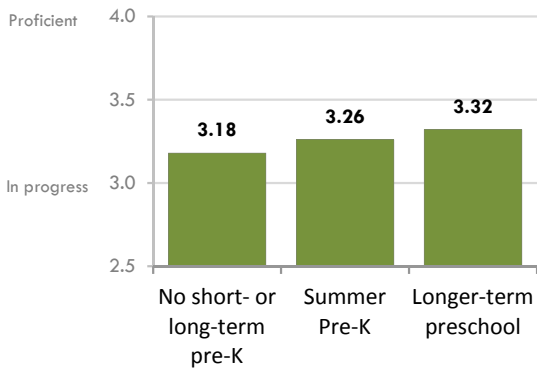
Percentage of Parents who Received Information Related to Readiness, by Child's Pre-K Experience

Parents of children who attended SPK are significantly more likely to have received important information about helping their child get ready for school, as compared to families whose children do not attend any type of pre-k program.



READINESS AND SPK PROGRAM PARTICIPATION

Overall Readiness Levels, by Child's Pre-K Experience



In four years of readiness studies, attendance in the SPK program has been consistently associated with small but meaningful readiness “boosts” at kindergarten entry. After adjusting for differences in their backgrounds, SPK graduates enter school with overall readiness levels that fall in between students with no pre-k experience at all and students who attended a longer-term program.

The types of readiness skills that are most strongly linked to SPK program participation have been from social-emotional readiness dimensions. In these dimensions, SPK graduates are often equal to students with longer-term preschool experiences. Generally, the SPK participants gain some “academic” skills as well during their short-term program (colors, shapes, counting objects, book awareness, etc.), but they typically do not reach the level of skills demonstrated by students who attended a longer-term preschool program.

FROM INFORMATION TO ACTION: PROMOTING READY CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

High-quality short-term interventions can be effective. Despite the limited amount of time that students and families are exposed to the SPK program, results show that participation is associated with modest but important gains in parent and child outcomes. The SPK program – and other high-quality short-term programs – should be considered as promising interventions in populations where many children have not had the benefit of a long-term preschool experience.

Continue targeting SPK outreach to those who need it most. Hispanic/Latino students, English learners, and students from families with low income and education levels are statistically less likely to have attended preschool in Alameda County than their peers. Outreach and recruitment for the SPK program – as well as longer-term preschool programs – should continue to focus on these students and families so they can gain the skills and information that their peers with longer-term preschool experiences have had.