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**FIRST 5 MARIN
KINDERGARTEN SCHOOL READINESS:
TEACHER'S FINDINGS AND OBSERVATIONS OF
THE CLASS OF 08-09**

Executive Summary

Prepared for:

Amy Reisch, Executive Director
First 5 Marin Children and Families Commission
1101 5th Avenue, Suite 215
San Rafael, CA 94901
415.257.8556

Prepared by:

jdcPartnerships
5711 Santa Cruz Ave
Richmond, CA 94804
510.525.6662

&

Dana Pepp
Ready for School Program Manager
First 5 Marin
1101 5th Avenue, Suite 215
San Rafael, CA 94901
415.257.8556

Contact:

Jara Dean-Coffey, MPH, Principal
jara@jdcPartnerships.com

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INTRODUCTION

This report summarizes findings from First 5 Marin's Fall 2008 survey of Marin County kindergarten teachers. The survey was sent to and completed by 46 teachers from 16 elementary schools in five Marin county school districts. The purpose of the two-part survey was to gain insight from current kindergarten teachers about the skills students need for a successful transition to kindergarten. The first part of the survey asked teachers for their opinions regarding the level of proficiency students need at entry to be ready for school. The survey then asked that teachers select among these 23 skills to indicate five they feel are "most important," the five "easiest to impact" and the five where they "spend the most time." The survey also asked teachers to provide some background information about curriculum used in their classrooms and their own educational backgrounds. The second section of the survey asked teachers to rate the proficiency of their 2008-09 students in each of five domains related to school readiness skills.

WHO RESPONDED TO THE SURVEY

Forty-six Kindergarten teachers from 16 elementary schools in five Marin County school districts responded to the survey for a 100% response rate. The majority of respondents were from schools in either Novato (44%) or San Rafael (41%). Respondents (kindergarten teachers) are primarily Caucasian (83%) followed by Latino (9%), Asian (6.5%), and African American (2%).

All respondents hold undergraduate degrees and are fully credentialed with an average of 8 years of experience teaching kindergarten (range 1 to 24 years). Additionally, one-fourth of respondents have graduate degrees – almost all of which relate directly to education.

HOW TEACHERS DESCRIBE THEIR CURRENT CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION

Teachers report using a combination of district-wide, school-wide, and/or self-created curriculum. Almost all teachers (89%) report utilizing programs or activities in their curriculum to address assisting English Language Learners. Nearly three-fourths (74%) report using programs or activities to address the development of children's self-regulation skills and more than one-half (59%) indicate using program or activities to address students with special needs. The majority of teachers also have had special training in at least one of these areas.

TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF IMPORTANCE OF SCHOOL READINESS SKILLS

Level of Proficiency Students Need for Transition to Kindergarten

Teachers were asked to rate 23 school readiness skills in six categories in terms of their perception of what students must have in order to make a successful transition into kindergarten. Each skill was rated on a scale of 1 to 4 where 1 = Not Yet; 2 = Beginning; 3 = In Progress; and 4 = Proficient.

Across all categories and school readiness skill areas, teachers' mean ratings suggest that students need to be *in progress*. In fact, with the exception of one skill (recognizing rhyming words), more than one-half of responding teachers indicated that students needed to be either "in progress" or already "proficient" upon entry. Eleven key school readiness skills were identified, distinguished by agreement from at least 90% of respondents that students need to be "in progress" or already "proficient" for successful transition into kindergarten (See Table 1). Overall, teachers' ratings suggest the importance of self-care, expression, and basic knowledge for successful transition to kindergarten.

Table 1. Key Skills for Successful Transition to Kindergarten

School Readiness Skill Area	Mean Rating for level of proficiency needed*	% Indicating Proficient	% Indicating In Progress
Perform basic self-help/self-care tasks	3.89	88.9%	11.1%
Recognizes eight primary colors	3.47	53.3%	42.2%
Appropriately expresses needs and wants verbally in primary language	3.44	51.1%	42.2%
Controls impulses and self-regulates	3.42	44.4%	53.3%
Follows one- to two-step directions	3.38	44.4%	48.9%
Works and plays cooperatively with peers	3.38	40.0%	57.8%
Participates successfully in circle time	3.36	37.8%	60.0%
Relates appropriately to adults other than parent/primary caregiver	3.34	37.8%	62.2%
Recognizes three primary shapes	3.33	46.7%	44.4%
Use of small manipulatives such as crayons, paintbrush, button, zippers	3.27	27.3%	72.7%
Expresses empathy or caring for others (e.g., consoles or comforts a friend who is crying)	3.04	13.3%	77.8%

* Scale 1 = Not Yet; 2 = Beginning; 3 = In Progress; and 4 = Proficient.

Top 5 Skills – Most Important for Kindergarten Entry

By far, the largest percentage of responding teachers (80%) indicated that a student's ability to *perform basic self-help/self-care tasks (toileting, eating, washing hands)* was among the top five skills needed at entry. Only 6.5% of teachers reported that this was among the five skills easiest to impact, and no teachers reported spending most of their time on this skill.

The other skills most commonly indicated as important at entry include:

- Controls impulses and self-regulates (59%)
- Works and plays cooperatively with peers (46%)
- Stays focused/pays attention during activities (44%)

Top 5 Skills – Easiest to Impact

In terms of areas, they perceive as easy to impact during the school year, teachers frequently selected skills related to Communication and Language Usage and/or Cognition and General Knowledge. Approximately one-half of teachers indicated that the following three skills were among the five easiest to impact.

- Writes own first name (52%)
- Recognizes eight primary colors (50%)
- Can count 10 objects correctly (48%)

Teachers were least likely to include Coping Skills (2% to 4% of teachers) among those easiest to impact during the school year, and inclusion of Social and Emotional Development Skills varied a bit but were also mostly infrequent (4% to 15%). (See Appendix B, Table 3 for full list of skills)

Top 5 Skills – Time Spent

While the greatest percentage of teachers (57%) included attending to alphabet recognition in their Top 5 areas of time spent during the school year, the next most common skills (listed below) on which teachers spend time relate primarily to student behavior and classroom management. (See Appendix B, Table 4 for full list of skills)

- Negotiates with peers to resolve social conflicts with adult guidance (e.g., engages in problem-solving), (54%)
- Stays focused / pays attention during activities (48%)
- Controls impulses and self-regulates (41%)
- Participates successfully in circle time (41%)
- Works and plays cooperatively with peers (35%)
- Follows one- to two-step directions (33%)

Summary

While teachers are confident in their abilities to impact students' academic development (as indicated in the commonality of several basic academic skills among the those that are "easiest to impact"), skills related to students coping and social and emotional development are harder to impact for most teachers and are commonly included among those where teachers are spending the most time. Taken as whole, teachers' ratings and indications of importance, impact, and time spent suggest that pre-kindergarten experiences that would benefit incoming students are those that attend to their self-care, social-emotional development, and basic knowledge.

OVERVIEW OF FINDINGS FROM KINDERGARTEN OBSERVATION FORM

Teachers were asked to rate each of their 2008-2009 entering students in terms of their general proficiency (proficiency scale: 1 = limited; 2 = beginning; 3 = in progress; 4 = proficient) in five areas:

1. Transition to School (e.g., able to adjust to a new routine and follow teacher instructions)
2. Fine Motor Skills (e.g., ability to hold a pencil and scissors, copy, write, or draw)
3. Engagement in Reading (e.g., listens to stories and pucks up books/reads on his/her own)
4. Language Development (e.g., speech is understandable, participates in conversations)
5. Cognitive Development (e.g., able to recognize and label shapes, colors, his/her own name)

Overall, teachers' mean ratings suggest that in fall 2008 these students were "in progress" in terms of their proficiency in each area. Means ranged from 3.0 for Fine Motor Skills and Language Development to 3.2 for Transition to School on a 4-point scale. While these means suggest, on average, moderate proficiency across all 46 classrooms, approximately 25%-30% of students were rated as having "limited" or "beginning" proficiency in each of the five areas.

HIGHLIGHTS & CONSIDERATIONS

Overall, responding kindergarten teachers tended to report confidence in their abilities to impact the basic academic skills commonly associated with kindergarten readiness. Skills and behaviors associated with students' social emotional development, while highly regarded in terms of the necessity for successful kindergarten transition, are more difficult to impact and are skills on which a large percentage of teachers report spending most of their time. Interestingly, nearly three-fourths of teachers note that their curriculum includes special programs to address the development of self-regulation skills. Further discussion with teachers might illuminate areas for professional development that could enhance these programs and further assist teachers in areas related to students' social and emotional development.

With respect to pre-kindergarten experiences, these survey results suggest that kindergarten teachers indicate that a child's social emotional readiness and coping skills are important and necessary to successful kindergarten transition. In order to learn in a school setting and achieve academically, kindergarten teachers indicate that children should come to school with basic self-care, social and emotional skills and language skills. Teachers' survey responses also suggest that the greater students' proficiency in these areas upon entry, the more focused time could be spent on more academic and fine motor skills, areas in which they teachers indicated they are most able to impact. Consideration should be given to how the current educational climate and perceptions of/prescriptions for early childhood educational experiences fit with the skills kindergarten teachers perceive as highly relevant to successful transition and the focus of early childhood experiences.

While, overall, teachers report the majority of students in kindergarten in early fall of the 2008-09 school year were "in progress" or "proficient" in each of five domains of school readiness, approximately one-quarter of students have beginning or limited proficiency in each of these domains. The lack of proficiency in important school readiness skills speaks to needs related to improving access to pre-K experiences as well as increased awareness and knowledge of how to impact children's growth and development in key aspects of school readiness among parents, caregivers, and early childhood education providers. Consideration as to how communities are currently and could further support young children in these early learning experiences, so that they can be more successful in school should be explored.

Sharing the results of this survey to increase awareness among various individuals and agencies -- preschools, family childcare providers, family education centers, kindergarten teachers, and the broader early childhood education community--that work and care for young children is important. More dialog needs to occur about effective and creative ways to partner with families to support and reinforce important school readiness skills in the home and in the daily lives of children.

Areas for further research might include a broader survey to the early childhood education community about expectations regarding school readiness skills and perceptions of where they can/should make the most impact. Further inquiry could also promote insight and foster dialogue about ways the early childhood education community and kindergarten teachers could work together to achieve the greatest impact in preparing young children for school and beyond.