Are San Francisco Kindergarteners Ready for School? 
*Report Shows Steady Improvement in Children’s Preparedness as Preschool Attendance Reaches Historic High*

August 30, 2010 (San Francisco) — Fifty-seven percent of San Francisco children entering kindergarten last year demonstrated proficiency in all of the “basic building blocks” of school readiness, representing a four percent gain since 2007, according to a report *Portrait of School Readiness 2009-10: San Francisco Unified School District*, released this week.

The report describes one possibility for the gains may be the substantial leap in the number of children attending preschool, which it cites as a significant contributor to boosting readiness. According to the report, preschool attendance in San Francisco jumped from 72 percent in 2007 to 83 percent in 2009.

The report notes that the gains in students’ readiness and preschool attendance were remarkable given that they occurred during a period of economic recession.

The children showed the greatest gains — an increase of more than four percent — in Kindergarten Academics, which includes skills such as recognizing letters, shapes and colors. The report predicts that, based on kindergarten readiness scores, 69 percent of kindergarteners would ultimately perform at the proficient or advanced levels on their English language arts and mathematics STAR tests in the third grade.

Although the report found racial/ethnic differences in readiness, gaps between white, Chinese, and Latino students were largely erased once risk factors such as teen/single parenthood, job loss, and family mobility were taken into account. The report, however, finds that African American children were less prepared than other groups even after taking into account the risk factors.

“Every child should be given the chance to succeed in school,” says San Francisco public schools superintendent Carlos Garcia. “And it is our collective responsibility to see that every child has that chance. We will only close the achievement gap when we impact the opportunity gap, and we need to do that before our kids arrive at kindergarten.”

**Preschool Makes a Difference**

Students with preschool experience scored higher across all basic building blocks as compared to their non-preschool peers. Preschool graduates entered kindergarten with significantly higher scores in “Kindergarten Academics” and “Social Expression.” Their preschool experience was also associated with greater proficiency in important pre-literacy skills such as recognizing letters, writing their name, and engaging with books.

(more)
“Thanks to Preschool for All, more than 11,000 children in San Francisco have accessed affordable, high-quality early education over the past five years,” said Laurel Kloomok, Executive Director of First 5 San Francisco, which administers the city’s Preschool for All program. “First 5 San Francisco funding has helped to create almost 550 new preschool spaces in the city, and we’re seeing the results of that investment in this report.”

According to the report, Latino and African American children were less likely to attend preschool. While 90 percent of Chinese and white children attended preschool, Latino and African American preschool attendance rates were about 80 percent.

The research on a representative group of 751 children entering kindergarten in 2009 was commissioned by SFUSD and First 5 San Francisco and conducted by San Jose-based Applied Survey Research.

“Our research shows that children who attend preschool start school with the necessary academic and social skills and are typically the same children who are successful in third-grade reading and math,” said Lisa Colvig-Amir, the lead researcher on the study. “Unfortunately, the opposite is also true. Children who start behind tend to stay behind. That’s why it’s so important to intervene early.”


What Can Parents Do About Children’s Readiness?

The report identifies several ways for parents to improve their children’s academic and social skills before kindergarten:

- **Enroll your child in a high-quality preschool.** Providing your child with early education opportunities in a curriculum-based, group setting is essential to developing school readiness skills. San Francisco’s Preschool for All program is offered at 123 sites throughout the city and helps make high-quality preschool affordable and accessible for families. For more information, visit www.first5sf.org or call 415-354-3873.

- **Take your child to the public library, zoo, museums, and parks.** Learning doesn’t just happen at school or at home. Libraries and parks are always free, and even the zoo and museums offer free admission on certain days each month.

- **Read with your child every day.** Set aside time each day to read with your child, starting as early as birth. Listening to stories, interacting with books, and reading are all important to language and literacy development. Programs like Raising a Reader, which is offered through many preschools, can help parents develop good reading habits with their children.

- **Get help with and talk to others about parenting.** You are your child’s first teacher. Your ability to cope with the daily demands of raising a child and helping him/her to grow and develop affects your child’s school readiness. If you need help, don’t hesitate to ask for advice from family and friends or contact one of San Francisco’s many Family Resource Centers (FRCs). A list of FRCs and services provided is available at www.first5sf.org.

- **Limit screen time.** The more time your child spends in front of a screen, watching television or playing video games, the less likely he/she will be prepared for school. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that young children should watch no more than one or two hours of television a day.