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## Half S.F. kindergartners not ready for school

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Every year, San Francisco teacher Ann Marin watches wide-eyed kindergartners stream into classrooms on the first day of school.

Only about half are ready for the academic and social rigors they'll face that first year.

"Some kids come in and haven't held a pencil before," she said, demonstrating the fist grip those student use. "And other kids know the alphabet and can write their name."

Researchers who evaluated 447 of last year's kindergartners across the district found that while half lack at least some needed skills, 11 percent were deficient both academically and socially. They were the most at-risk for failure now and in the future, according to results released Tuesday.

Those who lag on the first day of school still lag three years later, said Lynne Mobilio, director of research, Applied Survey Research, which conducted the study for San Francisco Unified School District and First 5 San Francisco.

The research was the first of its kind in the city, giving officials a baseline to measure whether solutions are working, school board member Hydra Mendoza said.

It also looked at personal or family characteristics and how they were related to school readiness.

Those who were ready more often were girls, attended preschool, were older, had no special needs, and had mothers who went to college, researchers found.

The mother's education was the most closely aligned with a child's readiness, trumping all other characteristics including family income, ethnicity and English language ability.

The study didn't address why these characteristics were associated with being ready for kindergarten, but only noted the connection.

Nonetheless, that information could help school officials identify those most likely to need help before they get to kindergarten.

Researchers found that preschool experience was a common trait among kids who showed up ready

to learn.

They also found that preschool could bridge the gap for those most at-risk: younger kindergartners, low-income tots, boys, Latinos, African Americans and those who did less reading with their families.

The city and school district is ahead of schedule in expanding San Francisco's Preschool for All program, which is serving 2,400 children this year in every ZIP code. The program offers free preschool regardless of family income level, funded by city Proposition H money as well as state, federal and school district resources.

Within three years, the city hopes to offer 4,800 spots, serving most of the city's 6,000 4 year olds. San Francisco is the only county in the state offering free universal preschool, Mayor Gavin Newsom said Tuesday.

"This city gets it," Newsom said. "But it not only gets it, it funds it."

The school district contributes \$40 million a year and the city chips in \$11 million. There is also federal funding.

### **Get ready, get set, start kindergarten**

These are the 24 skills associated with success in the first year of school

#### **Academics**

Recognizes letters

Recognizes shapes

Recognizes colors

Counts 10 objects

Engages with books

Writes own first name

Can recognize rhyming words

#### **Self-regulation**

Comforts self

Pays attention

Controls impulses

Follows directions

Negotiates solutions

Plays cooperatively

Participates in circle time

Handles frustration well

**Social expression**

Expresses empathy

Relates well to adults

Has expressive abilities

Is curious and eager to learn

Expresses needs and wants

Engages in symbolic play

**Self-care and motor skills**

Uses small manipulatives (teaching objects)

Has general coordination

Performs basic self-help/self-care tasks

**Source:** School Readiness Assessment 2007, San Francisco Unified School District

**S.f.'s kindergartners**

Here's a look at San Francisco kindergartners on the first day of school

**25 percent** were younger

than 5

**97 percent** were well rested and well fed

**20 percent** were overweight

**8 percent** have special needs

**47 percent** are designated English learners

**72 percent** attended preschool

**40 percent** from families with annual income below \$32,000

**25 percent** from families with annual income above \$100,000

**25 percent** from single-parent households

**17 percent** had a primary parent/guardian who lost a job in past year

**Source:** 2007 survey of 447 kindergartners, commissioned by San Francisco Unified School District/First 5 San Francisco

**Characteristics associated with higher levels of readiness for kindergarten**

-- Higher maternal education level

-- No special needs

-- Female

-- Attended preschool

-- Older

-- Greater parental coping skills

**Characteristics associated with lower levels of readiness for kindergarten**

-- Lower maternal education level

-- Has special needs

-- Male

-- No preschool

-- Younger

-- Less family reading

-- Low income

-- African American

-- Latino

**Source:** 2007 survey of 447 kindergartners, commissioned by San Francisco Unified School District/First 5 San Francisco

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