

## Introduction

Local residents ranked “children enter school ready to learn” as the top funding priority in San Bernardino County and the Pomona Valley. A child’s success in school is influenced by his/her access to early health care, quality child care and preschool education. The National Educational Goals Panel (NEGP) defines “school readiness” as being prepared to participate successfully in formal schooling (NEGP, 1998). For a child to develop to a stage of readiness, a variety of contributing factors must exist within the community. The current theoretical framework for school readiness consists of early care and education, parenting and family support services, health and social services, and accessibility to services. In addition, schools must be prepared to successfully integrate children of all development levels into the curriculum. This chapter highlights findings from the household survey as well as data from other sources.

## Household Needs Assessment Survey Results

### Preschool

- When the household survey respondents were asked about the availability of affordable preschool, 52% agreed with the statement “there are not enough affordable preschools.”
- The results were similar across all survey regions, with at least 50% of respondents agreeing that there is not enough affordable preschool.
- Among racial and ethnic groups, Blacks had the highest percentage of respondents (71.4%) who felt that there are not enough affordable preschools; about half of White (52.8%) and Hispanic (49.8%) respondents felt the same.
- The rate of persons feeling that there are not enough affordable preschools was fairly consistent across income levels.

### Childcare

- When asked about childcare, 35.9% of the survey respondents indicated that there was not enough affordable childcare. Results were similar across geographic regions in the study area.
- About half of the Black (55.5%) and Asian (50%) respondents felt there was not enough affordable childcare, while White and Hispanic respondents had similar responses to the overall average.
- Over half of the survey respondents (51.4%) indicated feeling that there are too many unsupervised children.

## Children Enter School Ready to Learn

- The geographic distribution of respondents who feel there are too many unsupervised children was fairly consistent, ranging from 57% in the High Desert region to 42.1% in the East Valley region
- Responses regarding unsupervised children varied by race and ethnicity. 63.3% of Black respondents indicated that there are too many unsupervised children, while only 30.8% of Asian respondents felt the same. About half of White (53%) and Hispanic (48.8%) respondents feel that there are too many unsupervised children.
- Many survey respondents indicated concern that there are too many children not living with their parents. Almost half (49.8%) of the survey respondents thought that a lot of children were not living with their parents.
- In three of the survey regions, High Desert, Central San Bernardino County, and Morongo Basin, about 60% of respondents felt that there were a lot of children not living with their parents.
- Feelings that many children were not living with their parents were highest among Black respondents at 78%. The percentage for every other racial group was below 50%.

### Health and Development

- Overall, 5.9% of survey respondents indicated that their family did not have access to immunizations.
- The Morongo Basin survey region had the highest percentage (13.9%) of respondents whose family did not have access to immunizations. Other regions were at or below the total average.
- 7.9% of White respondents indicated that their family did not have access to immunizations, while 4.4% of Hispanic respondents and 3.1% of Black respondents indicated the same. No Asian respondents indicated that their family did not have access to immunizations.
- Access to healthcare is discussed in the “People are Physically and Mentally Healthy” chapter of this report.

### Indicators

#### Preschool

- Because parents are a child’s first teachers, their educational attainment and attitudes toward education contribute to a child’s school readiness. In 2001, 31% of infants born in San Bernardino County were to mothers with less than 12 years of education. That same year, 28% of infants born in San Bernardino County were to fathers with less than 12 years of education. These are very similar to the

## Children Enter School Ready to Learn

California statewide percentages of 30% and 28%, respectively. (Kids Count, 2001)

- Since 1965 the federal Head Start program has been serving children. Operating at 40 sites throughout San Bernardino County, Head Start provided comprehensive early childhood development services to over 5,000 low-income preschool children during the 2002-2003 school year. The 2002-2003 fiscal year budget for San Bernardino County Head Start was \$33,870,809. (San Bernardino County Preschool Services Department, 2002)
- In November 1998 California voters passed Proposition 10, adding a 50-cents-per-pack tax on cigarettes to fund education, health, child care, and other programs for expectant parents and children during their first five years of life. That mandate is carried out by First 5 California, also known as the California Children and Families Commission, and 58 First 5 County Commissions. Proposition 10 taxes generate approximately \$700 million per year. Eighty percent of this money is divided among California's 58 counties, based on the counties' birth rates, to be spent with local needs and priorities in mind.
- Since its inception, First 5 San Bernardino County has focused attention on the importance of health, early childhood education, development for school readiness, and life-long learning potential. First 5 San Bernardino County receives approximately \$20-25 million annually. (First Five San Bernardino)
- As of 2003 Los Angeles County's local children and families commission, First Five LA, has allocated more than \$200 million to agencies and organizations that serve young children and their families. (First 5 LA, n.d.)

### Childcare

- In 2001, the supply of child care slots in San Bernardino County meets only 15% of the demand.
- According to the 2001 California Health Interview Survey, the current childcare arrangement for 31.6% of San Bernardino County respondents was a "grandparent or family member." Of respondents who said that they were not able to find child care, 36.7% said they "couldn't afford any." (California Health Interview Survey, 2001)
- In order to ensure the academic success of all children entering school, it is important to consider children from non-English speaking families. The California Department of Education defines English Learners as "those students for whom there is a report of a primary language other than English on the state-approved Home Language Survey and who, on the basis of the state approved oral language (grades K-12) assessment procedures and including literacy (grades 3-12 only), have been determined to lack the clearly defined English language skills of listening, comprehension, speaking, reading, and writing necessary to succeed in the school's regular instructional programs."

## Children Enter School Ready to Learn

- During the 2002-2003 school year, 28.25% (8,209 of 29,059) of kindergarten students in San Bernardino County public schools were considered English Language Learners. This is below the California state percentage of 37.82% (172,828 of 456,940).
- Individual school districts with the highest percentages of Kindergarten English Learners include: Ontario-Montclair Elementary (60.7%), Fontana Unified (53%), Baker Valley Unified (47.6%), Cucamonga Elementary (43.5%), Colton Joint Unified (34.2%), San Bernardino City Unified (32.4%), and Adelanto Elementary (31.5%). In the east end of Los Angeles County, 59.7% of Pomona Unified School District's kindergarten students were English Language Learners. (DataQuest, 2003)

### Politics and Policy

- California's Master Plan for Education includes a new school-readiness component which calls for statewide strategies to guarantee that all children have access to the conditions that promote learning. Specifically, the plan recommends that all infants and toddlers should have access to 1) preventive health screenings and assessments, 2) early intervention services and support, 3) adequate health care coverage, and 4) high-quality preschool. These issues are critical to producing ready learners. (California State Senate, 2002)
- In 2002 President Bush signed into law the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB)*, which intends to help bridge the achievement gap between disadvantaged and minority students and their peers. This law created the *Early Reading First*, a federal program designed to help young children acquire the fundamental skills they will need for optimal reading development. (No Child Left Behind, 2001)
- In February of 2003 President Bush created the "Strengthening Head Start" proposal which moves the administration of the Head Start program from control of the Department of Health and Human Services to Department of Education and places funding control in the hands of state government instead of local communities. (California Head Start Association, n.d.)
- In response, the National Head Start Association's "Save Head Start" campaign opposes President Bush's proposal, saying that it would "Dismantle Head Start, the most successful early childhood development program of its kind in the United States..." Head Start advocates also claim that putting the program under the Department of Education could mean elimination of current health initiatives and social services which are currently part of the program. (National Head Start Association, n.d.)
- Head Start advocates also believe that with so many states facing large budget deficits, the federal Head Start dollars could tempt governors to find other uses for the money. Additionally, with more channels for the money to go through,

## Children Enter School Ready to Learn

there could be more opportunities for the dollars to be siphoned from the program. (National Head Start Association, n.d.)

- On July 24, 2003, the House narrowly passed the School Readiness Act of 2003 (HR-2210), a bill to reauthorize Head Start funding through fiscal 2008, by a one-vote margin of 217-216. The bill converts Head Start to a block-grant program in eight yet-to-be-determined states, sets higher standards for professional staff, places greater emphasis on literacy skills, and permits religious organizations that run Head start programs to consider religion as an issue in the hiring of teachers. This bill authorizes spending of \$6.9 billion in fiscal 2004. (Washington Post, 2003)
- The California Department of Education states that the State Board of Education adopted new, more rigorous standards in 1997-1998. "These new standards, particularly those affecting the development of language, reading, and mathematics skills, are of great importance to preschool educators. Higher expectations in kindergarten and the primary grades will require children to enter kindergarten better prepared than ever before for new learning and skill development." (California Department of Education, n.d.)

### Health/Development

- The National Association for Education of Young Children (NAEYC) considers good health critical to the development of optimal physical, emotional, social, and cognitive capacities, and to children's readiness for school.
- Infants weighing less than 5.5 pounds at birth have an increased risk of experiencing developmental problems. In 2001, 6.7% of infants born in San Bernardino County were low birth weight. (Kids Count, 2001)
- In order to assess young children as they grow and develop, it is important that they have access to coordinated, continuous, comprehensive health care. Improving health care access for children, especially those from low-income families will help improve prevention and early diagnosis and treatment of health problems. During 2001, 14.3% of children in San Bernardino County were without continuous health insurance, ranking San Bernardino County 20<sup>th</sup> out of 58 California counties. The California state percentage of children without health insurance was also 14.3% in 2001. (Kids Count, 2001)
- Adequate immunizations protect children against diseases that killed or permanently impaired many children in past decades. San Bernardino County implemented a countywide immunization registry in 1994 to track immunization levels. A survey in 2000 indicated that there was an increase in immunizations from 43% to 70% based on 1994-1995 births.
- The Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program is designed for low-income women and children up to age 5. WIC improves the growth of nutritionally at-risk infants and children. Through WIC, families receive vouchers each month for specific nutritious foods, as well as individual counseling and health care

## Children Enter School Ready to Learn

referrals. During 1999, 38,231 children and infants participated in the WIC program in San Bernardino County, which is only 49.7% of the total eligible participants. (Children Now, 2001)

- Significant figures include the high Latina teen birth rate of 108 per 1,000 teens compared to an average of 40 per 1,000 teens of other ethnicities. The Black infant mortality rate of 19 per 1,000 infants is almost triple compared to 7 per 1,000 infants of other ethnic groups.

### Conclusions

- New state-wide and national standards have created higher expectations in kindergarten and the primary grades. This will require children to enter kindergarten better prepared than ever before.
- A child's success in school is influenced by his/her access to quality child care and preschool education. Current resource information about childcare and preschool providers is often difficult to find.
- There is not enough affordable child care or preschool education in the region. When examining the cost of child care in proportion to income, affordability proves to be a primary barrier to obtaining quality child care.
- There are not enough slots available for children needing child care/preschool in San Bernardino County. The current supply meets only about 15% of the demand.
- Early childhood poverty is closely linked to a number of negative outcomes in areas such as health and education.
- Lack of prenatal care, the high rate of teen births, and high infant mortality rates reveal deficiencies in prenatal healthcare access, parental educational programs, and basic health care access.

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## Children Enter School Ready to Learn

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## Children Enter School Ready to Learn

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