

# POLICY BRIEF

Oregon School Readiness Research Consortium

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## UNDERSTANDING COMMUNITIES SHEDS LIGHT ON SCHOOL READINESS

A STUDY OF OREGON'S KINDERGARTEN ASSESSMENT

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### What is School Readiness?

To get off to a strong start in kindergarten children need basic skills in self-regulation, social interaction, literacy, and math. These skills help children communicate with others, follow rules, and succeed academically. We know that a child's school readiness is determined by factors like their parents' education and income, and the quality of their early experiences with adult caregivers. Children's school readiness can also be affected by the conditions of the communities in which they grow up.

**The Oregon Kindergarten Assessment (OKA)** has measured children's school readiness upon entry at kindergarten annually since 2013. Readiness is measured in four areas: social skills, self-regulation, early literacy, and math.

### This Study

To help inform strategies to improve children's school readiness, this study looked at readiness community by community. We asked:

- How does school readiness differ across communities within Oregon?
- What factors help to explain these differences?

In other words, how much does the overall readiness of children entering Kindergarten in one school or county differ from neighboring schools or counties ... and why?

This study looked at Oregon Kindergarten Assessment (OKA) scores from the fall of 2014, and publicly available data about communities (e.g., American Community Survey, Oregon Department of Human Services, and others). **We use the term "community" to refer to school catchment areas, school districts, and/or counties.**

### How Does School Readiness Differ across Communities in Oregon?

*Finding 1: School readiness varies most dramatically from one school to the next.*

For example, schools' average math scores ranged from 4.5 to 11.9, out of a possible score of 16. **This is the difference between answering only 1/4 of the math items correctly and answering 3/4 of the math items correctly.** Scores also varied by district and county.

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### OKA scores, averaged for all Kindergartners within a school.

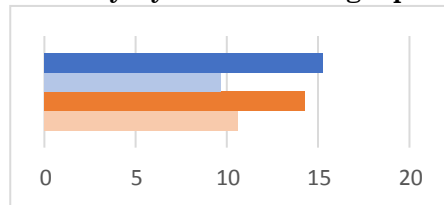
	Average across all schools in OR	Lowest Average Score for a School	Highest Average Score for a School	Range of Possible Scores
<b>Social Skills</b>	3.9	2.1	4.9	1 to 5
<b>Self-Regulation</b>	3.6	2.0	4.5	1 to 5
<b>Literacy</b>	12.4	2.5	30.0	0 to 100
<b>Math</b>	8.1	4.5	11.9	0 to 16

### What Factors Help to Explain Differences in School Readiness?

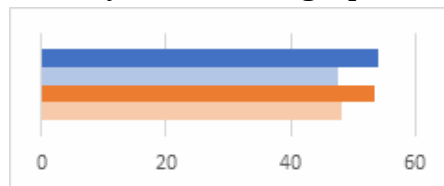
*Finding 2: Demographics of the Kindergartners in a school are linked with OKA scores.*

- All four school readiness skills were lower in schools serving more economically disadvantaged families<sup>+</sup>.
- Literacy and math scores were lower in schools serving more children who were English Language Learners (ELLs) from a racial/ethnic minority group<sup>++</sup>.

#### Literacy by school demographics



#### Math by school demographics



■ Low % economic disadvantage ■ High % economic disadvantage ■ Low % racial/ethnic minority ELLs ■ High % racial/ethnic minority ELLs

*For illustrative purposes the scales for literacy and math in these figures were made comparable.*

*Finding 3: Risks and resources of communities are linked with OKA scores.*

Community factors are also linked with the overall school readiness in those communities, including: availability of childcare, unemployment, crime, positive food environment (low food insecurity, access to healthy foods), maternal smoking, adult health, and child abuse and neglect.

**Three community factors were linked with school readiness even after accounting for demographics of the kindergartners and other community factors.**

#### *Counties with...*

... a larger proportion of **childcare slots** had more children with higher literacy scores, but lower social skills.

... a more **positive food environment** had more children with higher self-regulation.

... higher rates of **child abuse and neglect** had more children with lower literacy and math.

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### Conclusions

Children's school readiness skills vary between schools, as well as between school districts and counties. This means that both the communities in which children reside and the schools that they attend after entering kindergarten play key roles in strengthening their success.

To better prepare their children for success in school, communities should consider a broad array of areas such as early learning, health/nutrition, family support and violence prevention. The current study is just a start to identifying these factors. Findings are not conclusive enough to pinpoint specific factors that should be targeted, but do highlight the role of community factors in children's school readiness. Further research is needed to more specifically inform strategies to strengthen the school readiness of Oregon's children.

For communities whose children enter school with lower readiness skills, it will be important for the K-12 education system to have particularly strong supports in place to strengthen children's skills and support families in their roles as children's first and foremost teachers.

For more information: Visit the Oregon School Readiness Research Consortium website at: <http://health.oregonstate.edu/osrrc>.

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### Notes.

+Qualifying for free or reduced lunch.  
++Racial/ethnic minority status and ELL status were so closely related that we could not separate them in the current analyses.

### References:

- <sup>1</sup>Jeon, L., Buettner, C. K., & Hur, E. (2014). Family and neighborhood disadvantage, home environment, and children's school readiness. *Journal of Family Psychology, 28*(5), 718 – 727.
- <sup>2</sup>La Paro, K. M., & Pianta, R. C. (2000). Predicting children's competence in the early school years: A meta-analytic review. *Review of Educational Research, 70*, 443–484.
- <sup>3</sup>McCoy, D. C., Roy, A. L., & Raver, C. C. (2015). Neighborhood crime as a predictor of individual differences in emotional processing and regulation. *Developmental Science, 19*(1), 164-174.