

III. Desired Outcome: Children Are Succeeding In School

Indicators that capture children's experiences before they begin school, their status at school entry and their progress throughout their education all reflect children's success in school (see Table 4). In San Mateo County, more than half of all children enter school with the skills they need to make a smooth transition to kindergarten, and about half of all third graders do as well or better than their peers nationwide in reading. Caucasian/white and Asian students outperform those of other racial/ethnic groups on reading scores, high school dropout rates and college preparation.

Key issues related to children's success in school are summarized below, and more data are available at www.kidsdata.org.

Experiences Before Kindergarten: Child Care and Preschool

High-quality early childhood programs can prepare children for school by providing them with opportunities that build their social-emotional, cognitive, language and physical skills. For many families, however, especially in a high cost-of-living county such as San Mateo, the cost of child care or preschool can be prohibitive, and too few licensed child care spaces—of whatever quality—exist for the estimated number of children who need them. In 2005, the average annual cost of care for an infant was \$10,556 in a licensed family child care home and \$13,915 in a center—putting such care out of reach for 29% and 45% of families in the county, respectively.⁶⁶ Care for preschoolers is a little less expensive (\$9,828 per year in a licensed family child care home and \$9,376 per year in a center), but it is still costly enough that more than one-fourth of

**Table 4. Children Are Succeeding in School:
Key Indicators in San Mateo County**

Experiences Before Kindergarten Entry

- Availability of licensed child care

Status at Kindergarten Entry

- Children's readiness for kindergarten

Progress Through School

- Third grade reading proficiency
- High school dropouts
- College readiness

families in the county could not afford to enroll their preschooler in a family child care home (29%) or center (26%) in 2005.⁶⁷ In 2004, there were only enough licensed child care spaces in the county to serve 30% of the children ages 0-13 with parents in the labor force⁶⁸ (not all working parents need licensed child care; some, for example, may have relatives caring for their children).

To help increase the availability and affordability of child care and to help prepare children for school, First 5 San Mateo County launched Preschool for All (PFA) in 2005, which seeks to provide a preschool experience to all 3- and 4-year-olds in the county. Since its inception, PFA has provided 2,287 predominately low-income children with high-quality early childhood education experiences.⁶⁹ (More information about PFA is available at www.smcoe.k12.ca.us/apps/pub.asp?Q=186)

Children’s Readiness for Kindergarten

Surveys of children’s preparedness for kindergarten have been conducted in San Mateo County since 2001. The survey produces an overall measure of children’s readiness, as well as measures of children’s skills in self-care and motor development, self-regulation, social expression and kindergarten academics. Since 2001, overall levels of school readiness have increased slightly (from 3.15 in 2001 to 3.36 in 2005, on a 4-point scale, with 4 being the highest), but readiness has varied across skill areas.⁷⁰ In 2005, more than half (53%) of children came to kindergarten nearly proficient in every measured area, but 7% were not proficient in any of the 20 measured skills that made up the readiness measure.⁷¹ About one in five had good social-emotional skills but needed advancement in kindergarten academics. A similar percentage had good academic skills but needed practice on self-regulation and social expression. Kindergarten teachers identify these self-regulation skills (e.g., participating in circle time, focusing attention, controlling impulses) as the skills children need most when they enter school.⁷²

Children from low-income families were less ready for school than children from higher-income families. But low-income children who had participated in preschool scored near the countywide kindergarten readiness average, suggesting that preschool may help close the achievement gap that exists between children from upper- and lower-income families at school entry.⁷³

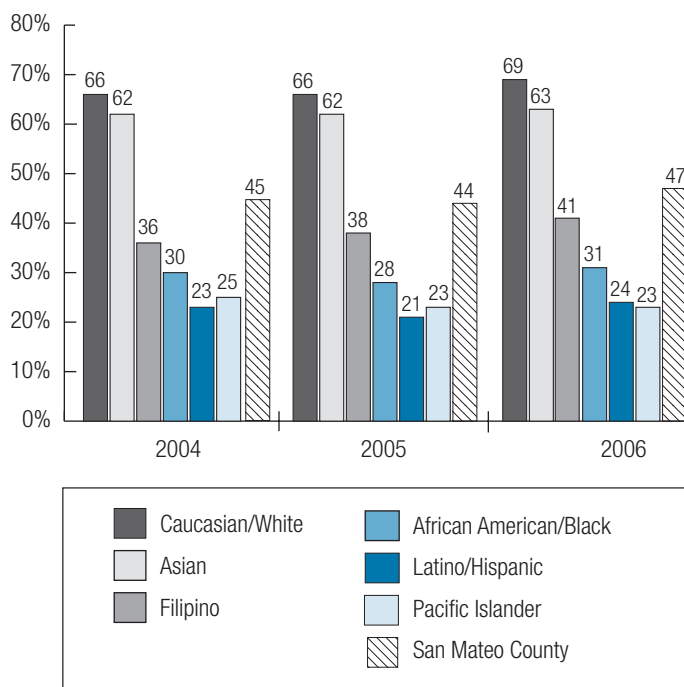
Children’s School Achievement

One of the most powerful indicators of academic progress is a child’s reading level at the end of the third grade, which is a strong predictor for later school success.⁷⁴ In San Mateo County, a greater percentage of third graders are reading at the national 50th percentile of the California Achievement Test (CAT/6) than in California as a whole: 47% in San Mateo County versus 37% in California in 2006.⁷⁵ Local and statewide scores have increased slowly in recent years. For example, the San Mateo County

average rose from 43% of third graders reading at the national 50th percentile in 2003 to 47% in 2006.

Still, there are very large economic, linguistic and racial/ethnic disparities in scores. Only 23% of economically disadvantaged students scored at or above the 50th percentile, while 61% of non-economically disadvantaged students did the same.⁷⁶ About 23% of all San Mateo County’s students are classified as English Learners (19,866 students in 2007).⁷⁷ Of third grade English Learners, only 19% scored at or above the 50th percentile, compared to 59% of those proficient in English. Caucasian/white and Asian students outperformed those in other racial/ethnic groups (see Figure 10).⁷⁸

Figure 10. Percentage of Third Grade Students in San Mateo County Reading at or Above the 50th Percentile on the CAT/6, by Race/Ethnicity



Source: California Department of Education, Standardized Testing and Reporting, 2006. Retrieved 10/17/06. <http://star.cde.ca.gov>, as cited on www.kidsdata.org.

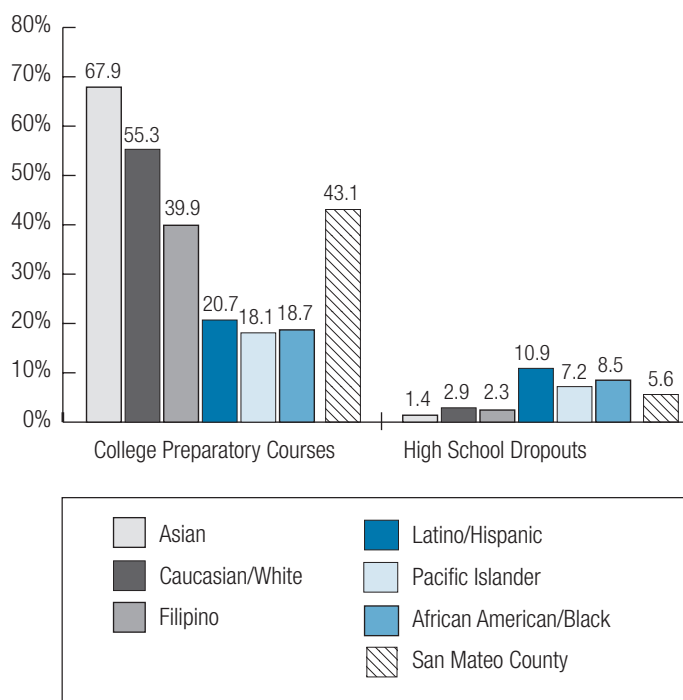
Note: In 2006, approximately 3,090 third graders scored at or above the 50th percentile. Of these, 1,550 were Caucasian/white; 250 Filipino; 560 Latino/Hispanic; 440 Asian; 80 African American; and 50 Pacific Islander.

These disparities are echoed in later years in measures such as high school dropouts and college preparation. Caucasian/white, Asian and Filipino students tend to stay in school longer and take more college preparatory classes than their African American, Latino/Hispanic, or Pacific Islander peers (see Figure 11).⁷⁹ Overall, however, San Mateo County students tend to outperform students in California, with lower percentages of high school dropouts and higher rates of college preparedness. From 1999-2005, the county's overall dropouts and college readiness figures remained relatively steady.

Other Data and Analyses

At this time, the California Department of Education provides aggregate but not individual student-level data on academic achievement. This means that the average performance rates can be reported for children of, for example, varying income levels, or English and non-English learners, but it is not possible to analyze school achievement scores by income level and language status simultaneously. Such analyses would facilitate a deeper understanding of how well children are succeeding in school. (For more information on education data, including scores for individual schools, see <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/>.)

Figure 11. High School Graduates Completing College Preparatory Courses and High School Dropouts in San Mateo County, by Race/Ethnicity (2005)



Source: California Department of Education, California Basic Educational Data System, 2006, <http://www.cde.ca.gov/>. Retrieved 10/27/06 and 11/01/06, as cited on www.kidsdata.org.

Note: In 2005, 2,280 of the county's 5,288 high school graduates had completed college preparatory courses. Of those, 491 were Asian; 1,163 Caucasian/white; 250 Filipino; 28 Pacific Islander; 43 African American; and 289 Latino/Hispanic. Of the estimated 375 high school dropouts in 2005, 11 were Asian; 71 Caucasian/white; 17 Filipino; 16 Pacific Islander; 30 African American; and 227 Latino/Hispanic.