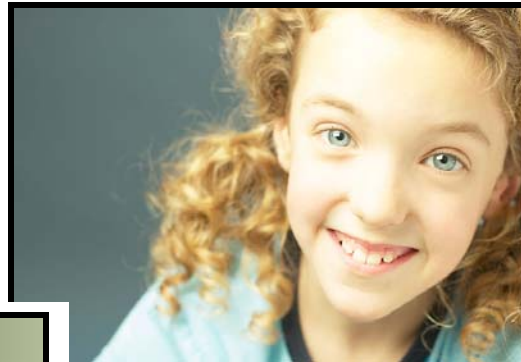


**Butte County Office of Education's
School Readiness Program: Building Bridges for Children
Overview and Results from Year Two (2004-05)**

Final Report of Impact Study:

Executive Summary

September 1st, 2005



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Fall 2005**

Butte County School Readiness Evaluation Project
Final Report: Impact Study
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I. Executive Summary

Funded by *California First 5* and *Butte County First 5 Commissions*, Butte County School Readiness Program (SRP) target children in the county who are in most need of services and supports as they enter kindergarten in five schools: Chapman and Rosedale Schools in Chico, Oakdale Heights and Poplar Avenue Schools in Oroville, and Berry Creek School in the foothills east of Oroville. Poplar Avenue School was a part of the state-wide School Readiness (SR) evaluation so it was not included in the local evaluation. The School Readiness Evaluation Project (SREP) was contracted to evaluate the impact of the local school readiness program. The study reports the results from five groups: kindergarten children and their readiness, families and community supports, kindergarten teachers, SRP Partners, and preschoolers in publicly funded preschools that serve the targeted SR Schools.

- Most kindergarteners were in very good or excellent health and had medical insurance.
- Children whose families engaged in literacy activities every day such as reading, singing, or telling stories had children who had significantly better mastery of developmental competencies upon entering kindergarten.
- Children who were not exposed to second-hand smoke also had significantly better kindergarten entry competencies than children who were exposed to smoke.
- Children whose parents had limited English proficiency and had less than a high school education also exhibited fewer school readiness competencies.
- Although kindergarten teachers rated themselves as marginally involved in SR Program activities and planning, the teachers offered many transition activities for registered parents who were enrolling their children in the fall for kindergarten.
- All the teachers defined ‘taking turns and sharing’, ‘communicating needs in their own language’, and ‘being able to follow instructions’ as critical school readiness competencies for incoming kindergarteners. Identifying colors and more knowledge-based information were seen as less necessary for new kindergarteners to have mastered.
- Schools’ capacity for transitioning in children into kindergarten also improved as reflected by increases in family-school connections, school support for parents, and school outreach to the larger service community.
- There were increased linkages between the SR Program and its partners, especially between the kindergarten and early care and education (ECE) teachers.
- On average, the preschoolers in Head Start and state preschool classrooms were rated by their preschool teachers as ready for kindergarten by the end of the program year.
- Overall, the SR Program provided the structure, leadership, services, and training to support school readiness activities in schools, in ECE programs, and in families in the surrounding five school communities.

Executive Summary: Expanded Narrative

This report includes four major parts:

- I. Executive Summary
- II. Expanded Narrative of Executive Summary
- III. Overview of Impact Study
- IV. Summary of Key Findings
- V. Full Report .of the Impact Study, and
- VI. Summary and Recommendations for Year Three from the Impact Study.

As a part of the School Readiness Initiative, the State has funded local School Readiness (SR) programs to narrow the achievement gap for entering kindergarteners who attend these underperforming schools. Butte County Office of Education was the entity which implemented the county's school readiness program: *School Readiness Program (SRP)—Building Bridges for Children*. Funding period started July 2003. The report reflects the results from Year Two (2004/05), but also includes comparisons between Year One and Year Two. In Appendix A, there is a figure that depicts the relationship among SRP, Butte County First Five Commission, the State-wide Evaluation of School Readiness, and CSUC as the external evaluator. Also included is the general timeline of activities of the evaluation study.

The *School Readiness Evaluation Project (SRE)* answered two questions: What is the impact of the county's School Readiness Program on children, families, schools, partners and the system in the larger community? In addition, did the *SR Program* implement its activities as promised? We answer the second question in another report called the "Implementation Report". This final report, the "Impact Report" answers as comprehensively as possible how the different groups were impacted by the SR Program.

The first part of this report summarizes the information about children's kindergarten entry profile (KEP), kindergarten families, SR partners, and from four elementary four schools in Butte County: Chapman and Rosedale in Chico, Oakdale Heights in Oroville, and Berry Creek outside of Oroville. Parents of all eligible kindergarteners in the four schools were invited to participate in the evaluation study. Data from approximately 52% of all eligible children participated as well as from all eligible kindergarten teachers. The results reflect the diversity of these communities in terms of income, maternal education, and ethnicity.

The second part of this report summarizes developmental information on preschool children in state preschools and Head Start classrooms. The level of school readiness of these preschoolers is of particular interest because they are the ones most likely to enroll in one of the five SR schools. Thus, the data provide a baseline for comparisons in future years of the *SR Program*.

Below is a narrative expansion of the *Executive Summary*:

There were no developmental differences in readiness among the children who lived in Chico or Oroville. In general, parents reported that the children were in good health, had regular medical and dental care, were covered by some type of medical insurance, and participated in some type of pre-kindergarten early learning experience (e.g., center-based or home-based childcare). The levels of general cognitive, communicative, and social competencies in the Butte County sample were twice the rate of levels reported in the statewide SR sample. Only about 25% of the entering kindergarteners were not quite 'ready'

In Year Two, over three-fourths of the parents had reported that their schools had some type of transition activity and almost all of them had met with their child's kindergarten teacher early in the academic year. In Year One, about two-thirds of the parents had participated in school readiness activities. For the second year in a row, about a third of the parents would have liked more activities that would help their child make a smoother transition into kindergarten than what was provided by the school.

Over 80% of the families had a regular medical home and reported that their children had seen a dentist within the last two years. Only about 5% of the families did not have medical insurance; that is, 95% of the families had medical insurance which was far more than the statewide average of 88%. All the parents reported having some type of literacy activity with their kindergartener. In addition, about 33% of the children were exposed to second-hand smoke in their households—twice the state rate of 17% for the second year in a row.

Over 70% of the kindergarteners had some type of formal pre-kindergarten experience (e.g., Head Start, state preschool, center-based childcare). The majority who had family child care experience also had center-based experience as well. Children who had higher levels of school readiness skills were those who had parents who participated in regular literacy activities with their children, who had mothers with more than a high school education, and who were monolingual English speakers or who were fluent bilingual speakers, and who were not exposed to second-hand smoke in the home. The pattern was replicated for the second year of study.

From teacher reports, the seventeen kindergarten classrooms contained children who are ethnically diverse (only 29% are European-Americans), and who were often learning English (40%). On average, the kindergarten teachers were veterans with over 20 years of teaching experience. Most kindergarten teachers perceived themselves as being only 'somewhat' involved in the School Readiness Program, yet all had implemented a number of transition activities (average of 7 per teacher). Very few barriers were identified by the kindergarten teachers as preventing them from being involved in the SR Program. When asked what characteristics were important in defining whether or not a child was 'ready' for kindergarten, all the kindergarten teachers identified, "taking turns and sharing", "communicating needs and wants in primary language", and "being able to follow directions".

As we begin to understand what children can and need to do upon entering kindergarten, schools are beginning to understand their role in school readiness. In the survey that assesses the schools' readiness for entering children, the results indicate improvement in three of the four areas measures: *family-school connections*, *school support for parents*, and *school-community connections*. Based on teacher report, the schools' involvement in school readiness has moved from "*Thinking about school readiness.*" To "*Have made steps toward a SR Plan.*" Rosedale School has made definite strides in formulating and implementing a SR plan that can be sustained, even if the SR Program ceases to exist.

From the beginning, the *SR Program* enlisted thirteen agencies to work with them in implementing SR activities. Over 50% of the partners were kindergarten teachers or school staff and 20% were ECE teachers. Over 50% of them attended SRP trainings or received some technical assistance (e.g., weekly visits from a language specialist who worked in a preschool classroom). Increases communication, collaboration, and trust were reported by the partners throughout the year. Partners identified the need for substance abuse program for parents as the greatest need for additional services in the county.

Baseline data for children in Head Start classrooms and state preschool classrooms that feed into the SR schools were also collected. The Head Start teachers rated their students on the *Creative Curriculum* assessment tool while state preschool teachers rated their students on the *Desired Results* (required by the State Department of Education). The subcategories were reconfigured into the four school readiness competencies: *cognition and general knowledge*, *communication and language skills*, *social competencies* and *emotional well-being*, and *positive approaches to learning*. An additional competency was assessed in both types of programs: large and small motor development and general physical health.

On average, the preschoolers in both types of programs moved from "*Emerging*" competencies in the early fall 2004 to "*Almost Fully Mastered*" in spring 2005. Overall, most of the children appeared 'ready for school'.

SR Program has a multi-pronged plan to reduce the gap by working with schools and their staffs to increase kindergarten transition activities, by working with the staff of early care and education programs (ECE) to strengthen children's competencies, by working with agencies who work with parents and families to strengthen structure and home learning activities, and by providing a structure to link agencies including schools with the agencies which support children's successful entry into school.

The *SR Program* staff should be commended for their success and efforts in implementing the county-wide plan. Staci Howell, Program Manager, had successfully completed her second year as Program Manager. In addition, Jan Davis and Sharon Asher have worked well together as they cover the entire five school communities.