



# Collaborating for Results: Children are Ready for School

The Alameda County Interagency Children's Policy Council (ICPC) serves as a catalyst for working together across County systems to improve outcomes related to the health, safety and success of our children. ICPC is composed of County agency and department directors, Board of Supervisor members and other County representatives. By using elements of Collective Impact and Results Based Accountability, ICPC holds itself accountable for improving indicators that measure how well our children are doing. For more general information about ICPC, please visit [www.acgov.org/icpc](http://www.acgov.org/icpc).

## Introduction

School readiness is recognized by researchers and the public as setting the stage for children's later success in school and life. Programs that improve school readiness also have a high return on investment. For example, the estimated return on investment for providing visits to parents and babies after birth (home visiting) is \$3-\$5.70 for every \$1 spent.

## School Readiness Indicator

*Ready for School based on measures of four building blocks of self-care/ motor skills, self-regulation, social expression, and academics*

### **Birth to 8 Initiative Work Group**

For the past several years, a group of County staff managing major programs serving children from ages birth to 8 have met on a regular basis. Their goals are to advocate for promising strategies and investments that improve outcomes, align and integrate work, provide County leadership on the importance of improving 0-8 outcomes, and develop mechanisms to collect and use data for communication and decision making. Rooted in Results Based Accountability and the Pathways social policy research frameworks, the first long term indicator this group has addressed is: Children are ready for school. Below are the County systems strategies to turn the curve on school readiness identified by the Birth to 8 Initiative.

## Story Behind the Curve

In 2013, a new Countywide baseline survey estimated that most—or 55%—of Alameda County's roughly 18,000 kindergarteners were not "Ready for School" based on measures of four building blocks of self-care and motor skills, self-regulation, social expression, and academics. **Among Oakland Unified School District, 60% of kindergarteners were not ready for school.** Children's health and well-being, age, English fluency, gender (being a girl), attending preschool, mother's education, and whether the family received information about school readiness were all positively associated with children's readiness.

## What Works to Turn the Curve

The Birth to 8 Initiative determined four different areas of "scaling and bridging" where the County could make a difference in maintaining or increasing the rate of children ready for school. These areas correlate with national best practices and the countywide School Readiness Assessment:

## Current Conditions

**55%** of Alameda County kindergarteners were not ready for school in 2013

**Scale home visiting to all Medi-Cal eligible families:** The County has a number of early childhood home visiting programs that provide intensive, long term case management services to at risk pregnant women and families. Home visiting has been shown to improve school readiness, among other outcomes. The County is currently serving 2,200 of the 5,600 Medi-Cal births, or about 40%. The Workgroup recommends expanding the reach of this program to reach **all mothers and babies who are on Medi-Cal at birth** to truly have an impact on future development and school success.

**Expand access to quality early care and education (ECE) for income eligible children:** The Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) is an organized way of assessing, improving and communicating the level of quality in early care and education settings and currently has the capacity to support 100 out of roughly 2,400 licensed programs in Alameda County. Child care for low-income families is subsidized by the federal and state government, but subsidies currently only reach 65% of those eligible. Quality early ECE has been shown to improve school readiness, especially for high risk children. The Workgroup recommends **increasing the number of licensed child care facilities using QRIS** to 428 from 100 and providing an additional 800 subsidized child care slots to eligible families.

**Expand Help Me Grow/early identification to all Medi-Cal eligible families:** Help Me Grow is a county-wide system to promote the development, learning and social-emotional health of children ages birth to 5. This program has three core components: Support for providers to promote early identification of children with development disabilities; a centralized telephone access point for child development information and referrals; and family access to community supports and collaboration among providers. Fewer than 30% of developmental disabilities or delays are identified before California's children enter Kindergarten, and approximately 89% of children with Medi-Cal have a developmental concern that has not been identified or addressed. Early intervention with high risk children have been shown to improve their social competence and cognitive abilities prior to school entry and reduces Special Education costs. The Workgroup recommends **expanding Help Me Grow to reach all children** ages 0-8 with Medi-Cal who have a developmental, behavior or learning need.

**Focus on consistent and effective transitions for families between programs and deepen their roots in mental health and parent engagement and leadership:** Better bridges between Home Visiting, Quality Child Care and Help Me Grow need to be built to support transitions for families. Mental health services support the capacity of young children to form close and secure relationships, self-regulation, and the ability to learn. They are a core component of Home Visiting, Quality Early Care and Education, and Help Me Grow, but they need to be strengthened. Family Involvement is also needed to give families a primary decision making role in the care of their own children, as well as in the development of policies and procedures governing care for all children. The Workgroup recommends supporting **a system wide early childhood mental health coordinator**.

**Next Steps:** Alameda County leaders are being asked to prioritize scaling and bridging three major County programs serving young children, through advocating for their expansion in new federal, state and local public policy and inclusion in private foundation grants. Inroads have already been made with a Long Foundation two year commitment to expand Help Me Grow, and Packard Foundation support for evaluating the quality of all Oakland preschools. In 2015, the B8 Initiative will seek ways to broaden Collective Impact around School Readiness with parents, community organizations, and schools by leveraging collaboration with existing planning groups. ICPC Results are tracked using the Results Based Accountability Scorecard - check out [www.acgov.org/icpc](http://www.acgov.org/icpc) to track our results.