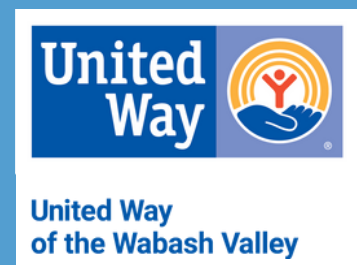


United Way of the Wabash Valley's Kindergarten Readiness Report 2020-2021



In Partnership With:
Clay Community Schools
Marshall Community Unit Schools
North Central Parke Community School Corporation
Saint Patrick School
South Vermillion Community School Corporation
Southwest School Corporation
Vigo County School Corporation



Report Overview

Kindergarten readiness is determined by much more than just a child's age; it is important that children develop particular skills prior to entering kindergarten that will provide them with a strong and lasting foundation for educational as well as overall developmental success. Ultimately, kindergarten readiness is about the entire community. Families, caregivers, healthcare professionals, and other community members must work together to support the healthy development of our community's youngest members. As United Way of the Wabash Valley (UWWV) pursues our *bold goal of moving 10,000 families out of financial struggles and into stability*, we look forward to continuing to build collaborations and to developing and supporting lasting solutions that will improve the lives of our children and their families and help our community as a whole to thrive.

The UWWV Success By 6 Impact Council understands that educational programs beginning in early childhood develop essential literacy, math, and social/emotional skills that prepare children for success in kindergarten and overall achievement in school and life. Without these skills, children begin school already behind, and though they can improve, most may never completely catch up to their classmates. To illustrate, children who start school on firm footing have an 82% chance of mastering basic skills by age 11, compared to only 45% for children who lack adequate preparation.¹ For these reasons, UWWV supports initiatives to improve kindergarten readiness to set each child and our community as a whole on a path toward success.

Chance of mastering basic skills by
age 11 by school preparedness

82%

Solid Start

45%

Start Behind

How can we evaluate whether our initiatives are helping children acquire the skills needed to be ready for kindergarten? To evaluate the effectiveness of our community's work, in 2019 UWWV created and piloted a simple and consistent assessment to measure a broad set of proficiencies of incoming kindergarten students. Using this annual assessment, we can report our progress to the community and to our donors. Further, we can use the results to enhance early childhood education programs and generate greater support and resources for our work, which will benefit children in every school corporation in our six-county service area (Clay, Parke, Sullivan, Vermillion, and Vigo counties in Indiana and Clark county in Illinois) and our entire community.

In our 2019 pilot study, which assessed over 400 students from 33 different schools, we found the average kindergarten readiness score to be 75 on a 100-point scale. This score of 75 represents our baseline against which future measurements will be compared as we evaluate the impact of our community's efforts to ensure children are taught the skills necessary to be ready for kindergarten. We are pleased to share the results of our second annual kindergarten readiness assessment with the community.



[1] J.B. Pritzker, Jeffrey L. Bradach, Katherine Kaufmann "Achieving Kindergarten Readiness for All Children." Bridgespan Group and Pritzker's Children's Initiative, 2015. <https://www.bridgespan.org/bridgespan/Images/articles/achieving-kindergarten-readiness/early-childhood-funder-guide-2015.pdf>

Community Investment

The Success By 6 Impact Council (SB6) is one of five impact councils that operate under UWWV's collective impact model. Each impact council is a multisector, volunteer-led coalition that brings together subject matter experts, individuals who are passionate about the council's focus issue and whose lives are affected by the issue, business leaders, as well as other organizations that are working to address the council's focus all while working towards UWWV's bold goal. SB6 develops, recommends, and monitors investments that provide every child with the opportunity to develop basic skills so that these children may enter kindergarten ready to learn. This impact council believes that by providing and supporting innovative initiatives to improve early childhood education, we can break the cycle of generational poverty and bring more households into financial stability.

Since the publication of the results from our 2019 pilot assessment, UWWV has invested in a number of initiatives to improve the quality of childcare and Pre-K programs within our community and engage preschool-aged children.

Current Investments

Quality Childcare Initiative

This initiative invested \$168,000 to our awardees to improve their quality rating or increase capacity at already rated high-quality sites. This investment will create a higher-quality care environment for over 170 children per year. Overall this initiative since it began in 2018 has created over 300 new high-quality openings in the Wabash Valley.

Real Men Read & Read UNITED!

Our popular Real Men Read and Read UNITED! programs bring adult mentors into kindergarten and preschool classrooms to promote early literacy and fun in reading. In addition, they distribute multiple books to all children to build their home libraries and promote reading outside of the classroom.

Strong Start - K-Pack Initiative

The K-Pack Initiative, partially funded by a grant from Early Learning Indiana, is working to give children a solid foundation for lifelong learning. K-Packs, created by Success By 6, included activity plans and materials that provided families with instructions on how to develop foundational skills. Success By 6 has distributed 2,700 K-Packs to local preschool and kindergarten-aged children.

Early Childhood Education Credential Assistance Program (CAP)

Early education program administrators have expressed a need for higher qualified staff, but students working towards attaining their qualifications site cost as a significant barrier. The ECE CAP provides an additional incentive scholarship for qualified applicants to support students attaining a credential or degree in early childhood education.

Book Boxes

Success By 6 Book Boxes are small lending libraries rotated through area childcare sites with books that are available for children to borrow on a daily basis.

Professional Development Grants

Professional Development Grants fund childcare providers and early education professionals that work with children ages 0-6 to attend continuing education programs.

On My Way Pre-K

United Way provides the matching funds for the On My Way Pre-K grants to 4-year-olds from low-income families, giving them access to a high-quality Pre-K program the year before they begin kindergarten.

How We Collected the Data

In our baseline study conducted during the 2019-20 school year, SB6 used Indiana Foundation Standards, DIBELS (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills), and the expertise of experienced local kindergarten and Pre-K educators to develop a 15-question Kindergarten Readiness Checklist (KRC). The KRC was sent to kindergarten teachers in every county in our six-county service area, along with a one-page guide to ensure consistent interpretation and use. Our intent was to devise a statistically sound process that would require minimal extra work for busy kindergarten teachers and that would be easy to coordinate and repeat each year. Our pilot study determined that the process used to administer the KRC was effective and minimally disruptive for kindergarten teachers. Thus, the same methodology was used to administer the KRC during the 2020-2021 school year.



Here's what we did:



Random sampling statistics indicated we could achieve a 4.5% error or less with 90% confidence by sampling 20% of the total kindergarten population. To achieve 20% of our average 20-student class meant that teachers assessed four students per class.



To ensure a random sampling, we asked the teachers to start with last names on their class roster beginning with the letter "N" and to select the next four students alphabetically. Teachers adhered to this process to avoid the potential for bias.



Before beginning the KRC assessment, teachers were asked to state whether they themselves thought each student was "kindergarten ready." The teachers' feedback helped us gauge whether the readiness scores derived from the KRC assessment corresponded to the perspective of a professional educator.



Teachers filled in the KRC forms by hand, typically completing the process for four students in less than 20 minutes. They did not include student names, but they did list whether the students had attended a Pre-K program.



We converted the teachers' assessments to numerical scores and compiled them in a database so that we could analyze and report the results. The kindergarten readiness scores were converted and presented on an easier-to-understand 100-point scale.



To thank the teachers for their extra efforts, SB6 provided all participating kindergarten classes with a Scholastic ten-book pack for their classroom library.

Our second annual assessment was conducted in only in-person kindergarten settings in September 2020, as this was early enough in the school year to ensure that responses to the KRC were not skewed by learning that had taken place during the 2020-21 school year. It is the intent of SB6 to conduct all future KRC assessments in September of each year and release results via our kindergarten readiness report in November of the same year. The results of the 2020-21 school year assessment contained here were delayed due to complications related to the COVID-19 pandemic that should not affect future reporting cycles.



What the Overall Data Tells Us

We continue to appreciate the willingness of principals and teachers to participate in this assessment. Of the 40 elementary schools (110 kindergarten classes) in the six-county service area for the 2020-21 school year, 34 schools and 96 classes took part. Teachers completed KRCs for 384 students, representing 20% of kindergartners in those 96 classrooms.

The scores for each of the 15 skill categories were averaged, and then those results were compiled into an overall average “kindergarten readiness” score that was normalized on a 100-point scale. As mentioned previously, the overall kindergarten readiness score for our pilot study conducted during the 2019-20 school year was 75. Our second annual assessment conducted during the 2020-21 school year showed a small increase in this score, to 78.



It is important to keep in mind that the value of this study is to track a trend from year to year—not to deliver a grade—so we can demonstrate that UWWV and other community support programs are better equipping our children to succeed in school right from the start.

What does this improved score tell us? Does a difference of three points, from a score of 75 to a score of 78, represent a major improvement? The small difference between our pilot study and our second annual assessment likely does not represent a real difference among kindergarten students. However, this increase in overall kindergarten readiness scores may be a promising indicator that improvements in early childhood education are beginning to have an impact and that greater improvements may be seen over the next several years.

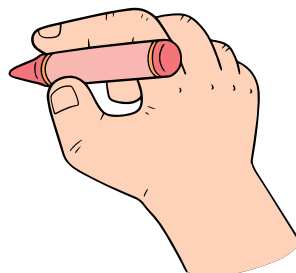
Drilling Down for Additional Observations

In addition to the overall trend in school readiness, there is much more we can learn from this data. As shown below, the KRC assessment revealed the relative strengths and weaknesses of the children’s skillsets as they entered kindergarten. For example, overall, students showed a strong ability to use words during conflict instead of physical force (score of 87.2) as well as a strong ability to grasp and use crayons, markers, and pencils (score of 85.7). However, the kindergarteners assessed during the 2020-21 school year showed weaker abilities overall for skills such as identifying 13 letters by name (score of 62) and following multistep directions (score of 64.9).



**Strong ability to use words during
conflict instead of physical force
Score of 87.2**

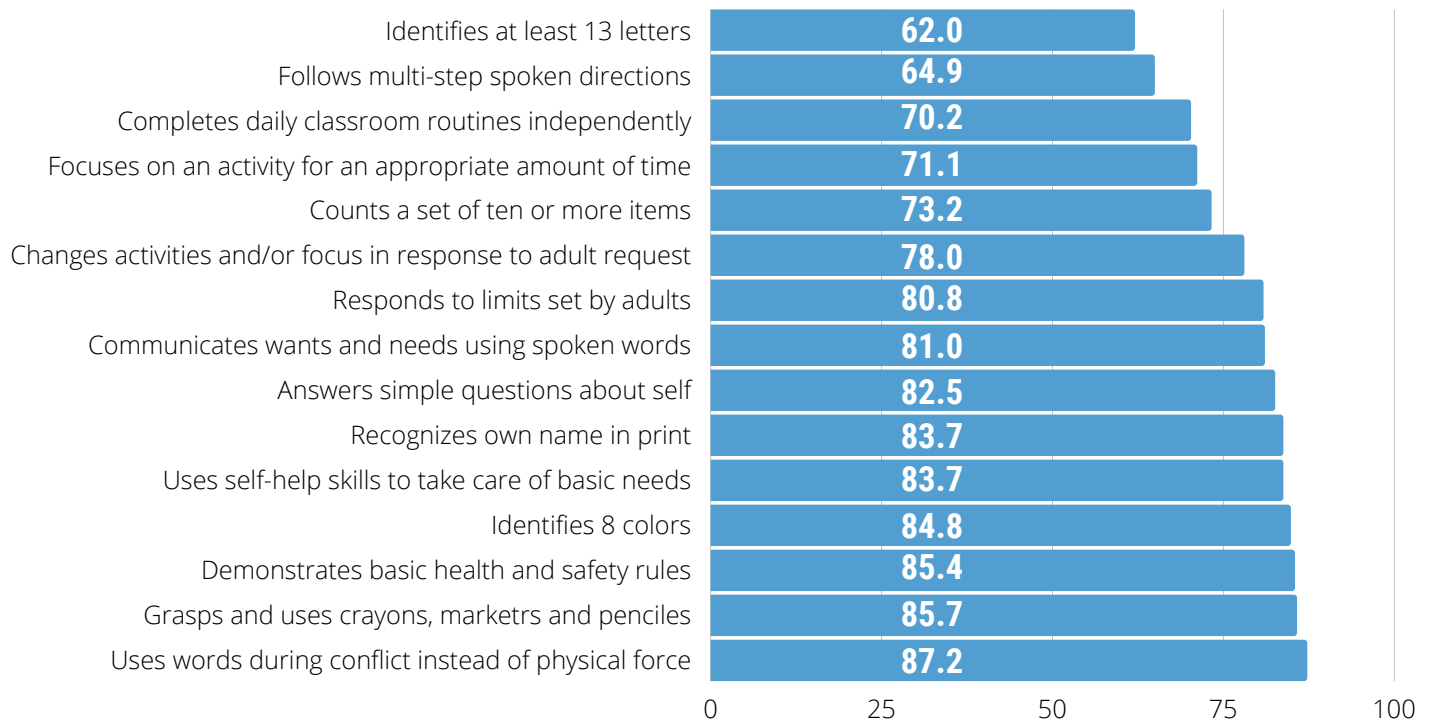
**Strong ability to grasp and use
crayons, markers, and pencils
Score of 85.7**



**Identifying 13 letters by name
Score of 62**

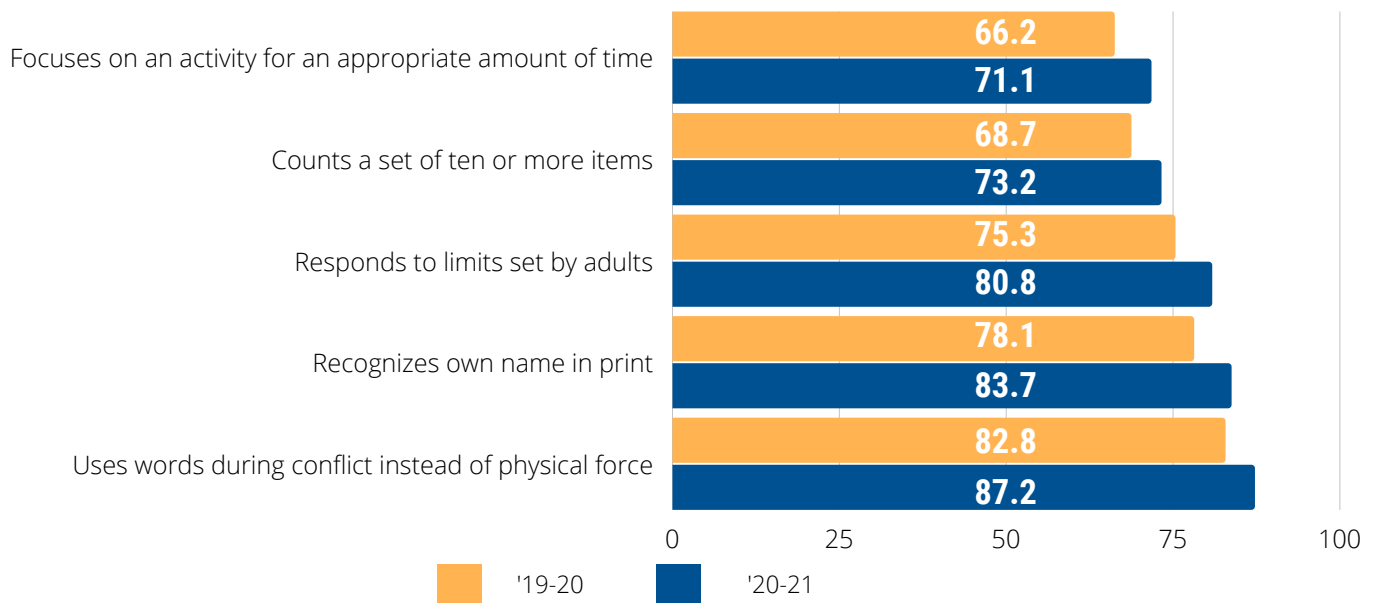
As you look at the chart below, please keep in mind that a score of 100 indicates that the student frequently demonstrated a particular skill or knowledge set; a score of 50 indicates that the student only sometimes demonstrated the skill; and a score of 0 means that the student rarely displayed it, if at all.

UWWV Report on 2020-2021 Kindergarten Readiness KRC Score Results for "All Students" by Skillset on 100-Point Scale



When comparing scores from our 2019-20 assessment to those from our most recent assessment, scores improved on 13 of the 15 items measured by the KRC. The chart below compares the five KRC skillsets that saw the most change from the previous to the current assessment.

UWWV Report on 2019-20 vs. 2020-21 Kindergarten Readiness KRC Score Results for "All Students" by Skillset on 100-Point Scale



Teachers' Initial Assessments

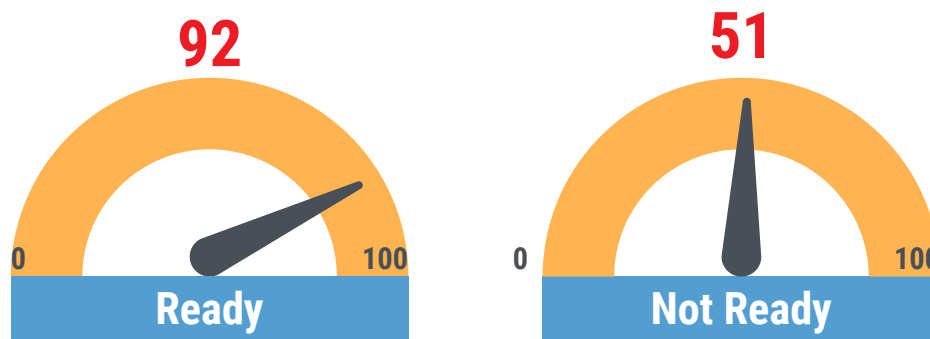
Before the teachers completed the 15-question KRC, we asked them to offer their own assessment of their students' preparation for school based on their teaching experience and the curriculum standards on which they focus during kindergarten. The chart below shows that teachers assessed 69% of their students as ready and 31% as not ready during the 2020-21 school year. How do these personal assessments compare to the results of the KRCs? In both the formal KRC measurements and less-formal initial assessments provided by teachers, approximately one-third of students were determined to be lacking the preparation needed to make an easy and successful transition into kindergarten. More specifically, the data from the KRC assessments showed that 39% of students were below the average score of 78, which is not incredibly far from the 31% deemed not ready by the teachers' initial assessments. As with our previous assessment, teachers assessed approximately one-third of their incoming kindergarten students as "not ready" for kindergarten.



1/3 of students not ready for kindergarten

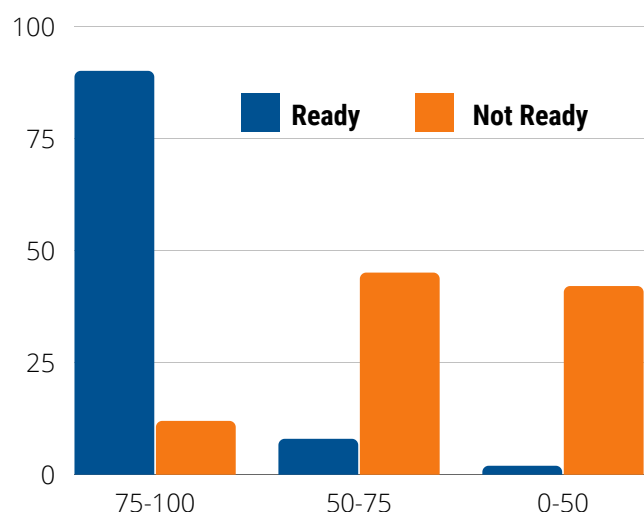
Additionally, when we calculated the average KRC scores of those students whom the teachers had initially evaluated as "ready" and "not ready," we found differences between the two groups similar to the differences found in our 2019-20 school year pilot study. Students whom teachers had identified as "ready" had an average KRC score of 92, while those who were determined "not ready" by their teachers had an average KRC score of 51.

Average KRC Score for Ready vs. Not Ready based on Teachers' Initial Assessments



Note that scores for both groups were higher in our 2020-21 school year assessment than they were in our pilot study. Further, the chart on the right shows stark discrepancies between these two groups of kindergarteners, with 91% of those students who were deemed "ready" receiving a score of 75 or higher and only 2% receiving a score of 50 or lower; compared to those students who were deemed "not ready," only 13% of whom received a score of 75 or higher and 42% received a score of 50 or lower on the KRC.

Percent of Students Assessed Ready vs. Not Ready by KRC Score Range



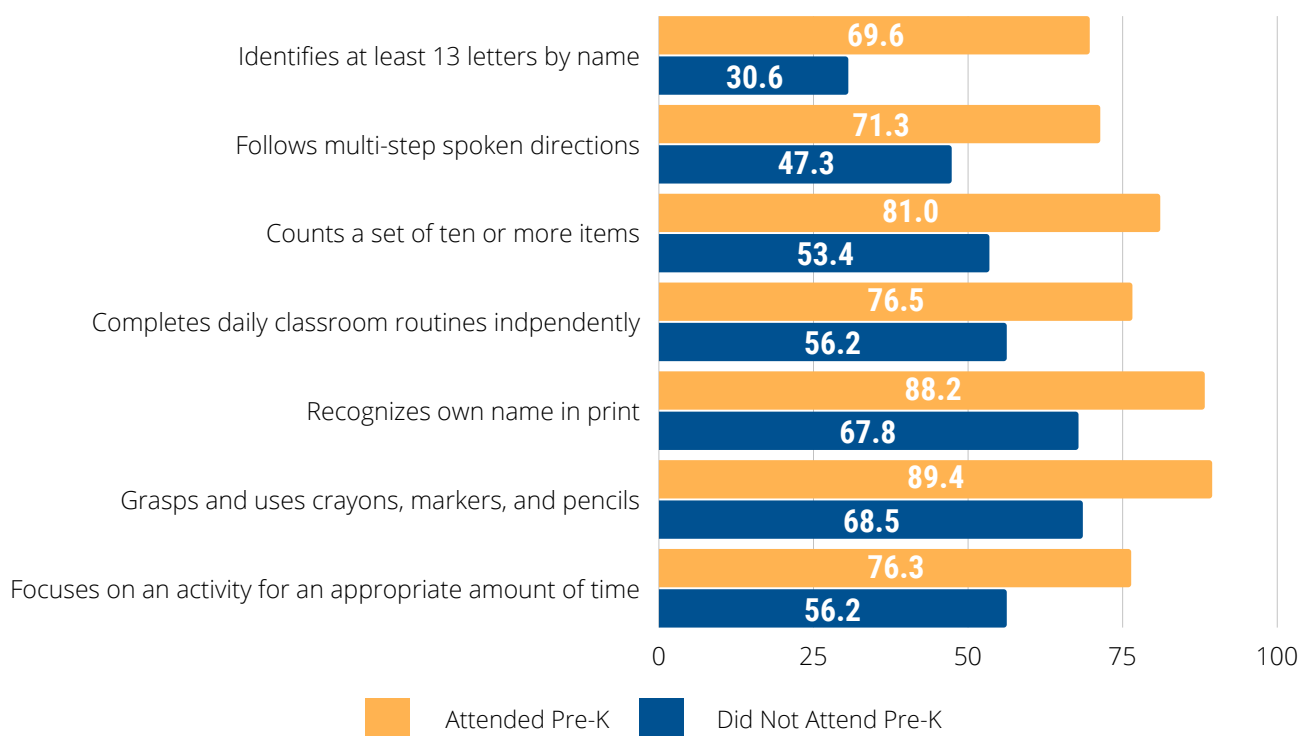
The Positive Impact of Pre-Kindergarten

As with the previous year, this study also provided data on kindergartners who attended a preschool program and those who did not. Of the 384 students assessed, teachers confirmed that at least 73 arrived at kindergarten without having first attended Pre-K (19% or potentially more of our sample since some teachers could not confirm Pre-K participation for all students assessed). For those 73 students, the average KRC score was 65. In comparison, the average KRC score for students who did attend Pre-K was 83, eighteen points higher than those students who did not attend Pre-K. In fact, only 37% of those kindergartners who did not attend Pre-K scored at or above an 83 on the KRC, with 63% having scores below an 83. Of the 63% of students who did not attend Pre-K and scored below an 83, 24% received a KRC score of 50 or less, suggesting a significant gap in literacy, math, and social-emotional skills between children who do and do not attend a Pre-K program.



The chart below displays the seven KRC items that had the greatest discrepancies in scores between those students who did and did not attend a Pre-K program prior to entering kindergarten in the 2020-21 school year. Note that while only seven skillsets are displayed below, all 15 skillsets measured by the KRC showed higher scores for those who attended Pre-K when compared to those who did not.

KRC Scores for "Students Who Attended Pre-K" vs. "Students Who Did Not Attend Pre-K" by Skillset



These differences in KRC skillset scores between those kindergartners who did and did not attend Pre-K reveal the potent effects and overall importance of Pre-K attendance for children's development. As seen in the chart above, not only does Pre-K attendance lead to stronger abilities in basic skills like identifying letters and counting, but it also fosters equally important abilities such as following multistep directions, completing routines independently, and focusing on tasks for an appropriate amount of time—abilities that are fundamental to success in kindergarten and throughout the rest of a child's educational career.

Considering Results in Light of COVID-19

Results from our second annual kindergarten readiness assessment should be evaluated with the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic in mind. We anticipated that KRC scores would potentially be lower during the 2020-21 school year as compared to 2019-20, as incoming kindergartners may have missed or had their Pre-K experiences cut short due to pandemic-related restrictions on child care as well as state-wide lockdowns enacted in early 2020. However, this was not the case, as the overall average KRC score increased, albeit slightly.

There could be a variety of explanations for this counterintuitive result. The timing of the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns and restrictions may have occurred such that the pandemic had minimal impact on those attending Pre-K in early 2020 (the same group which would be later attending kindergarten during the 2020-21 school year). In Indiana, pandemic-related lockdowns and closures of childcare facilities did not occur until late March of 2020, and many childcare facilities were able to reopen relatively quickly, meaning the time that many Pre-K students were out of a class prior to entering kindergarten in the fall of 2020 was relatively short. In fact, when comparing results between our 2019-20 and 2020-21 school year assessments, we see almost no difference in the percentage of our sample that had not attended Pre-K (20% in the 2019-20 school year vs. 19% in the 2020-21 school year), indicating that the pandemic likely had little impact on students' ability to attend their Pre-K programs.



An additional consideration for the unexpected increase in scores could also be whether the population of kindergarten students for the 2020-21 school year differed from the population attending during the 2019-20 school year. There were several factors that might have come into play, such as parents' views on the safety of sending their children into an in-class learning environment, the effect COVID-19 may or may not have had on parents' employment, income, and health statuses and differing views on the priority of educating their children. These factors may have influenced parents' decisions to send their children to school, and therefore may have perhaps altered the composition of the in-school kindergarten population from which the kindergarten assessment sample was drawn.

Summary Conclusions

With the completion of its second annual kindergarten readiness assessment, SB6 continues to see the vital role Pre-K plays in a child's development and overall preparedness for school. While a small improvement was seen in the average KRC score compared to the previous year's assessment, this difference was likely too small to be noticeable in the classroom. However, SB6 recognizes that truly noticeable impacts will likely take place over several years as SB6 continues to make investments in our community; the small improvement found in this year's assessment is a hopeful indicator that these investments have begun to make a difference, albeit very minor thus far. As with our previous assessment, kindergarten teachers continued to report that they considered approximately one-third of their students to be "not ready" for kindergarten. Further, SB6 continues to find stark discrepancies between the skills of children who did and did not attend Pre-K, with students who did attend Pre-K consistently showing higher KRC scores overall as well as for each individual skillset evaluated by the KRC. These differences demonstrate in clear terms the importance of quality early childhood education in the development of the literacy, math, and social-emotional skills that children need to succeed in school and in life.



Potential for Further Observations

With existing resources, SB6 was able to conduct our kindergarten readiness assessment for the second consecutive year, yielding another set of useful data on overall kindergarten readiness in our six-county service area. As this assessment is conducted over the coming years, we will begin to have a clearer picture of the overall trends in kindergarten readiness within our community.

A larger sample of students would need to be assessed in order to expand the study to look at kindergarten readiness by individual school corporations or by classroom. More robust sample size may even allow us to break down the data by the Pre-K programs the students attended, and begin to explore how differences among Pre-K programs may translate into differences in overall kindergarten readiness. However, additional donor support and council resources will be necessary to further advance the scope of these analyses.

How Does This Data Help Our Community?

The early years of a child's life are a critical time for learning, and all children should enter kindergarten with the skills needed to unlock their potential. By measuring how well young students in our community are prepared for kindergarten, SB6 can evaluate and report on the effectiveness of our community's work over time. Moreover, we can promote new initiatives that target specific weaknesses made evident by the Kindergarten Readiness Checklist results.

Collecting KRC data in a consistent way year after year can provide SB6, parents, school corporations, and childcare providers with a wealth of feedback on children's areas of strength and those that need extra attention. The information can also open up opportunities for collaboration among many sectors of the community and a creative search for solutions.

Preparing our children for kindergarten is a smart investment in our community's future, resulting in more educated and skilled workers, higher wages in life, increased tax revenue, more effective public schools, improved public and personal health, and less crime.² Studies indicate that public returns on this investment for our communities may be within the range of \$7 to \$12 for every dollar spent³ and can be as high as \$16 for every one dollar spent.⁴ Kindergarten readiness today strengthens our workforce tomorrow, impacting economic growth, competitiveness, and overall quality of life in our community.

As United Way of the Wabash Valley pursues our bold goal of moving 10,000 families out of financial struggles and into stability, we look forward to bringing the community together to find lasting solutions that will improve the lives of our children and their families. Every child who is "kindergarten ready" builds hope to break our cycle of poverty and aid our struggling working families.



[2] Katharine B. Stevens "Workforce of Today, Workforce of Tomorrow: The Business Case for High-Quality Childcare," U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation, June 2017. <https://www.uschamberfoundation.org/reports/workforce-todayworkforce-tomorrow>

[3] "High Return on Investment (ROI)," The Center for High Impact Philanthropy. <https://www.impact.upenn.edu/early-childhood-toolkit/why-invest/what-is-the-return-on-investment/>

[4] Timothy Bartik "Early Childhood Programs as an Economic Development Tool: Investing Early to Prepare the Future Workforce," W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research. https://www.purdue.edu/hhs/hdfs/fii/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/s_wifis31c03.pdf