



First 5 Kings County Linkages 2 Learning (L2L) Program

Highlights from the Fiscal Year 2011–12 Evaluation

What is Linkages 2 Learning?

Linkages 2 Learning (L2L) is a kindergarten transition program established to create a better system of transition for children scheduled to enter kindergarten. This system is built on the belief that a community approach to kindergarten entry is most effective in ensuring the child is prepared to enter school ready to learn. The L2L Project established Kindergarten Transition teams at each of its elementary school sites comprised of school site personnel, family service providers, early care educators, and parents of children attending kindergarten at each respective school site. These multi-disciplinary teams plan and implement activities aimed at preparing child, family, school, and community for the impending transition to kindergarten.

Program Highlights

- **1,021** children participated in First 5 Kings County kindergarten transition activities in the 2012–13 school year;
- **1,516** children received backpacks filled with classroom supplies and school readiness materials at early kindergarten registration events;
- **649** children participated in pre-kindergarten assessments to evaluate children's readiness to enter school;
- **584** children and their parents attended Spring Kindergarten orientation events where they had opportunities to tour the school, meet with teachers, and visit kindergarten classrooms;
- **36** children who never attended preschool were enrolled in the Next Step Kindergarten (NSK) summer early education program; and,
- **10** school sites supported transition teams comprised of kindergarten teachers and preschool providers with formal transition plans.

Evaluation Design

First 5 Kings County partnered with an outside evaluation research firm, EMT Associates, Inc., to conduct an evaluation of L2L kindergarten transition activities for children entering kindergarten in the 2012–13 school year. The purpose of the evaluation was to document L2L program implementation and outcomes across participating school sites, and to offer recommendations for future program enhancements. The evaluation included multiple data collection components, including documentation of participant characteristics, surveys of parents and kindergarten teachers, and interviews with school readiness staff.

L2L Schools and Districts

Armona Elementary School District
Armona Elementary School

Reef-Sunset Elementary School District
Avenal Elementary School
Kettleman City Elementary School
Tamarack Elementary School

Kit Carson Elementary School District
Kit Carson Elementary

Hanford Elementary School District
Hamilton Elementary School
Monroe Elementary School
Lee Richmond Elementary School
Roosevelt Elementary School
Washington Elementary School

Profile of Kings County Kindergarten Children

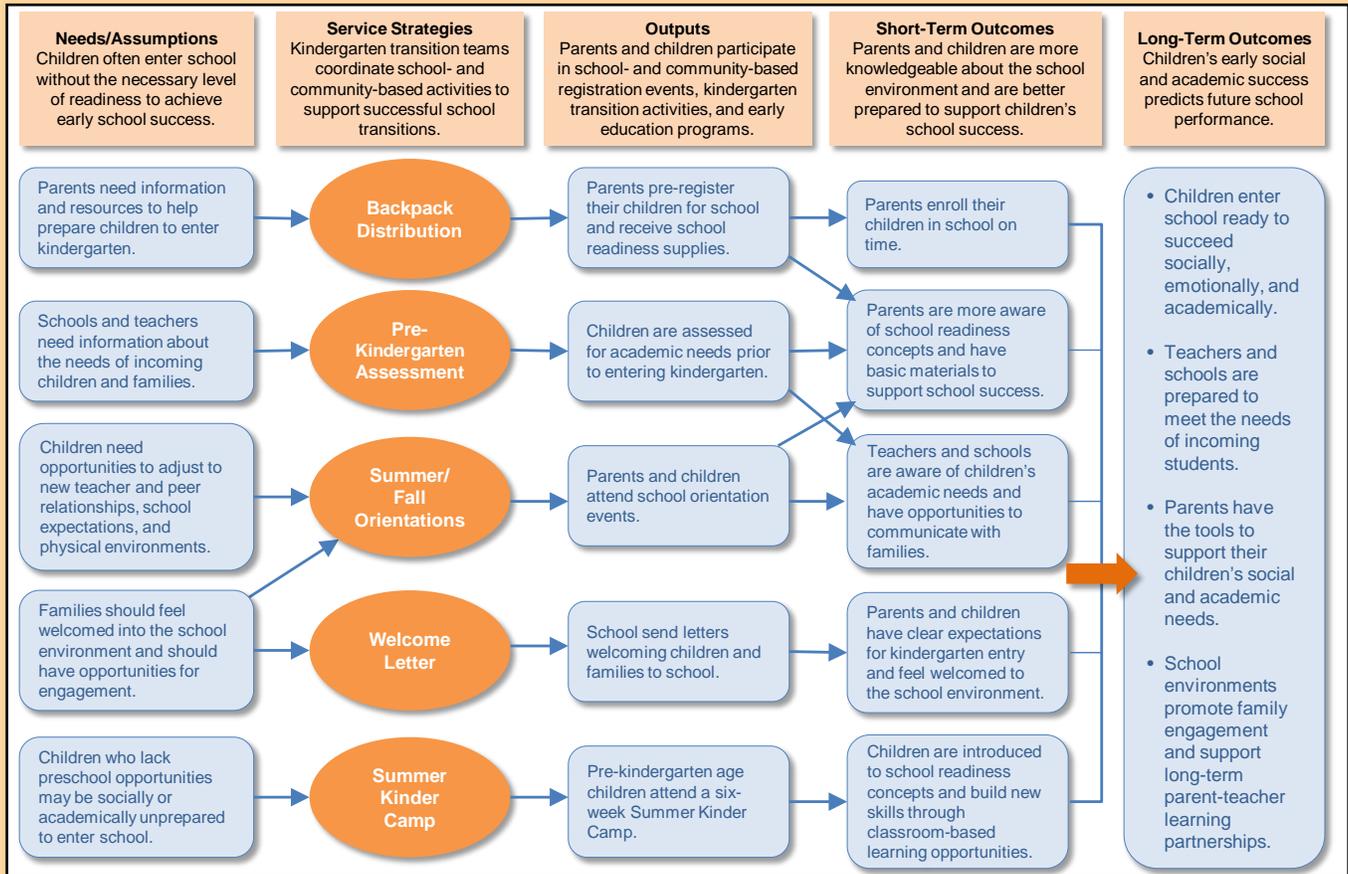
- **2,465** children countywide were enrolled in Kings County kindergarten classrooms in 2011–12.
- **65 percent** were Hispanic, **24 percent** were White, **5 percent** were African-American, and **6 percent** were multiracial or other race groups.
- **64 percent** were socio-economically disadvantaged.
- **24 percent** had limited proficiency in English.
- **32 percent** of those who registered early for kindergarten never attended preschool.

Source:
CA Department of Education,
First 5 Kings County

What were the purposes, strategies, and intended outcomes of L2L kindergarten transition activities?

Research has shown that successful school transitions are important to ensure that children enter school ready to learn, and that effective kindergarten transition practices can have positive effects on children’s future school success. The L2L program logic model below describes the need for systems to support successful school transitions and identifies strategies, outputs, and short and long-term outcomes associated with L2L program activities.

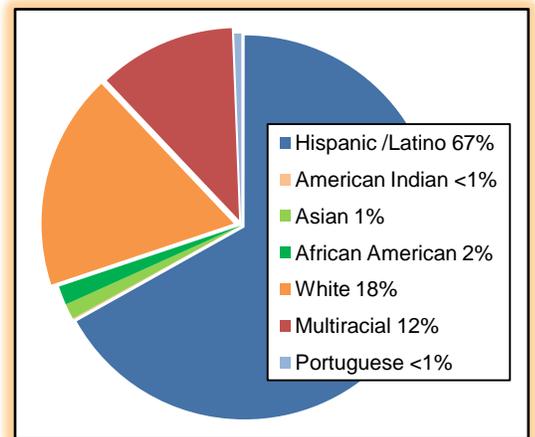
Linkages to Learning Program Logic Model



Were school transition activities targeted to the highest need children and schools?

First 5 Kings County was successful in directing resources to high need elementary schools countywide. Ten schools within the Armona, Hanford, Kit Carson, and Reef-Sunset Elementary School Districts partnered with First 5 Kings County to offer a full array of core kindergarten transition activities, including Spring and Fall Orientation events, pre-kindergarten assessments, and welcome letters to incoming students. All ten schools were either socio-economically disadvantaged (i.e., more than 70 percent of enrolled children were eligible for free or reduced lunch) or were designated as underperforming schools. Countywide, all 11 districts and all 27 elementary schools participated in backpack distributions to encourage early school registration. Together, these school readiness activities reached 1,779 kindergarten children. Among those who received core services, about one-third were from non-native English speaking families, and one-third never attended preschool. These are children who research has shown to be at greatest risk for educational disparities.

Race/Ethnicity of L2L Participants (n =1,021)



Were children and families actively utilizing school transition resources?

First 5 Kings County and its school and community partners supported a range of transition activities, including:

Backpack Distribution

Parents who registered their children early for kindergarten received a backpack filled with basic school supplies and school readiness materials selected with input from kindergarten teachers. Materials included school readiness workbooks, flashcards, dry erase boards, and other classroom supplies. These early registration events open lines of communication between schools and incoming families, enable schools to plan for the upcoming school year, and provide useful resources to families who may not otherwise be able to afford them. Backpacks were distributed to 1,516 incoming kindergarteners countywide for 2012–13.

Pre-Kindergarten Assessments

Teachers at all participating elementary school sites administered pre-kindergarten assessments to help parents and teachers identify school readiness needs. In 2012, 649 children completed pre-kindergarten assessments to evaluate children's school readiness.

Spring and Fall Orientations

Schools hosted Spring and Fall orientation events to provide opportunities for families to meet kindergarten teachers, tour their elementary school, visit kindergarten classrooms, and learn about strategies for building children's school readiness skills. In 2012, 415 children attended Spring orientations and 585 attended Fall events.

Summer Learning Program

L2L supported a six-week Next Step Kindergarten (NSK) summer early education program in Hanford enrolling 36 children. Schools used pre-kindergarten assessments to identify and refer high need children who had never attended preschool and who were most likely to benefit from additional school readiness support.

Welcome Letter

L2L schools mailed letters to families of incoming kindergarten children prior to the first day of school to welcome them to their new schools.

What were the benefits for children and schools?

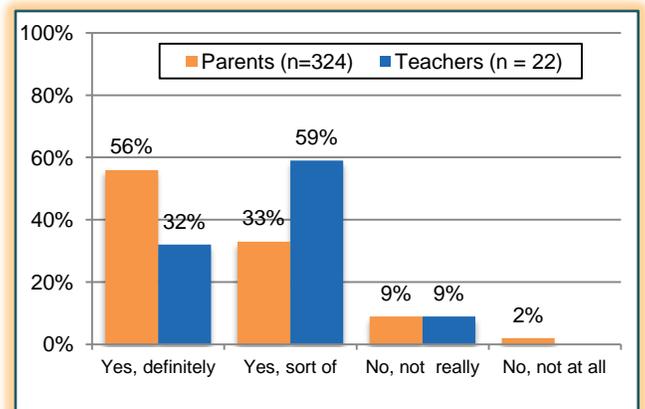
Parents and teachers of kindergarten children were surveyed to gauge perceptions of the value of different L2L activities in supporting school transitions and the perceived impact on children's overall school readiness. Parents (n=408) were asked to rate different transition activities, with responses ranging from 'very helpful (4)' to 'not helpful at all (1)'. The activities that parents

perceived to be most beneficial included:

- Visiting their child's classroom (mean = 3.91),
- Meeting with the teacher (mean = 3.91),
- Touring the school (mean = 3.83), and,
- Pre-registering to receive backpacks (mean = 3.81).

Activities targeting children enrolled or enrolling in kindergarten were viewed as more helpful than activities targeting preschool-age children. Overall, parents rated L2L activities highly favorably, with more than half (51%) rating services as 'definitely' helpful in easing the entry into school. Two-thirds felt that their own child's school transition had been 'very successful'. Perceptions held by Spanish-speaking parents were comparable to those of English-speakers suggesting that L2L staff and schools succeeded in overcoming barriers to engaging harder-to-reach families. Teacher perceptions of L2L activities were also positive, though more mixed, with 32 percent reporting that transition activities were 'definitely' helpful and 59 percent rating them as at least 'sort of' helpful.

Teacher and Parent Perceptions of the 'Helpfulness' of L2L Activities



What did we learn?

The First 5 Kings County L2L program reached a significant portion of kindergarten children entering public schools. It was also successful in targeting more intensive resources both to areas of highest need, and to families that have been traditionally underserved in school and community education settings. The program offered activities that were highly valued by parents, and that teachers perceived to be mostly beneficial in preparing children for school. First 5 Kings County also actively utilized feedback from parents and teachers to shape its program strategies and activities, and is continuing to seek new ways to engage hard-to-reach families through community outreach. L2L should continue to seek ways to further maximize benefits to children and schools, and should use kindergarten transition as an opportunity to cultivate parent engagement in ways that support children's continuing learning and future school success.