

# Readying Our State: How Kindergarten Readiness Inventories Can Benefit California

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## Executive Summary

*Readying Our State: How Kindergarten Readiness Inventories Can Benefit California* describes why and how California should develop a strategy to collect and use kindergarten readiness data across the state. By examining the ways Kindergarten Readiness Inventories (KRIs) have been employed by individual California counties and other states, this paper makes the case for their thoughtful use across California, in order to improve school outcomes and direct funding for new and planned early childhood programs.

Kindergarten readiness is a major predictor of later academic success. Research suggests that third- and eighth-grade test scores in low-income districts in California lag behind national counterparts because children start out less ready for school in our state. Nationwide, children from households with low income enter school with fewer skills than their more advantaged peers, and children of color are less likely to be ready, as well.

There is a national trend toward states adopting KRIs to improve classroom instruction and to gain an understanding of the population at an aggregate level to support policy making. Data from KRIs have been used to inform state policy decisions about early learning resources and systems, and to provide information about kindergarten readiness of important subgroups, in places like Washington, Oregon, and Maryland.

Twenty-five California counties are using KRI tools, and these counties have used data for a variety of purposes, including improving community resources and informing local funding decisions and initiatives. Most California counties are not systematically administering a KRI, however, and would need additional support and resources to do so. Given the power that KRI data provide to improve school and community support for young learners, California should allocate funding to ensure every county collects this data.



Beyond use at the county level, California lacks data at the state level that provide a full picture of its education system, or of disparities in school readiness and achievement. Statewide data collection could offer the ability to link data from pre-kindergarten to third grade math and reading scores and social emotional readiness; to link pre-kindergarten data to other systems, like health; to map progress from year to year by various geographic levels; and to offer systems-level insights into the benefits of various kinds of programs and investments.

California should pursue a statewide approach to collecting county-level kindergarten readiness data, based on county experiences. The state's planning and policymaking processes would be improved by the creation of a statewide approach that collects comparable data, this would also help state and local governments address the greatest inequities that exist within communities. As part of the process, the state should engage a wide range of stakeholders, ensure KRI tools appropriately measure Dual Language Learners and children with special needs, include parent information, and use flexible reporting.