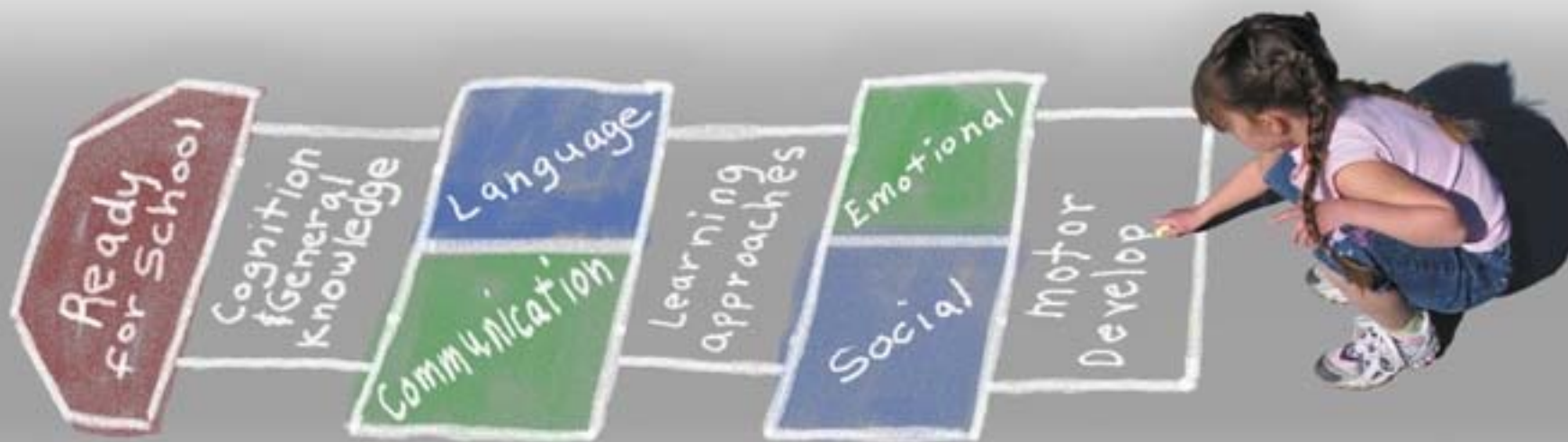# Taking Data from Awareness → Action to Improve School Readiness for Diverse Young Children

Activities supported by First 5 Santa Clara County and the Santa Clara County Partnership for School Readiness

Today's "Story"

- **Santa Clara County sits at the center of Silicon Valley –** great ethnic and economic diversity

- **In 2002, more than $150 million was being invested – yearly! – in early child development**

- **Despite general recognition that children need to enter school ready to learn, there was no information about readiness levels county-wide, and no standardized measure of school readiness**

Today's "Story"

- **The Partnership for School Readiness was born**

- **Their first step? To measure just how ready new kindergarten students were for school**

- **Analysis of 3 years of data revealed two consistent and pressing readiness needs**

- **Awareness-to-Action Study Circles were impaneled to drive community change so that more children would become ready for – and successful in – school**

Chapter 1:

The Partnership for School Readiness and an assessment method were born

First, Shared Goals Were Identified

- In 2001, a group of public and private funders, focused on early childhood development, formed the **Santa Clara County Partnership for School Readiness**

- Their goals?

**Ready Children**   **Ready Families**   **Ready Schools**

 + +

Fostering the growth and development of children's skills so that they arrive "ready"

Guiding families and caregivers to support their children's education

Creating awareness of healthy development so schools can better serve the diversity of children who arrive

Next, A Clear Readiness Benchmark Was Needed

- **A clear picture of children's readiness skills was needed before resources could be strategically targeted**

So …
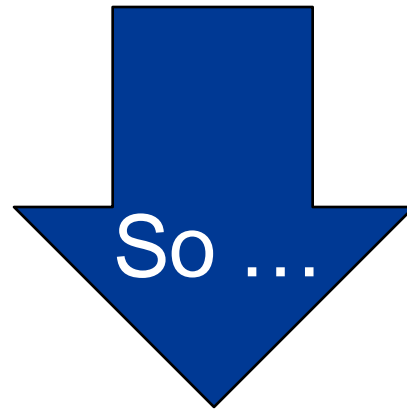
- **A 3 year, county-wide benchmark of readiness in Santa Clara County was launched in 2004**

An Air-Tight Method Was Rolled Out

Approach
- Random sample of schools & classes
- Trained teachers serve as expert observers
- Each child is assessed on **23** readiness skills
- Occurs 4 weeks after start of school
- Assessment is conducted in primary languages

Tools
- *Kindergarten Observation Form*
- *Parent Information Form*
- *Teacher Survey on Importance of Readiness Skills*

Generalizable
- To the 20,000+ kindergarten students enrolled in Santa Clara County
- Margin of error = (+ / -) 3.6%

Data collection
- 2,176 children were assessed over 3 years
- Consent (94%) and response rates (82%) were robust

Chapter 2:

Analysis revealed readiness strengths and challenges … and identified groups of children in need of extra supports
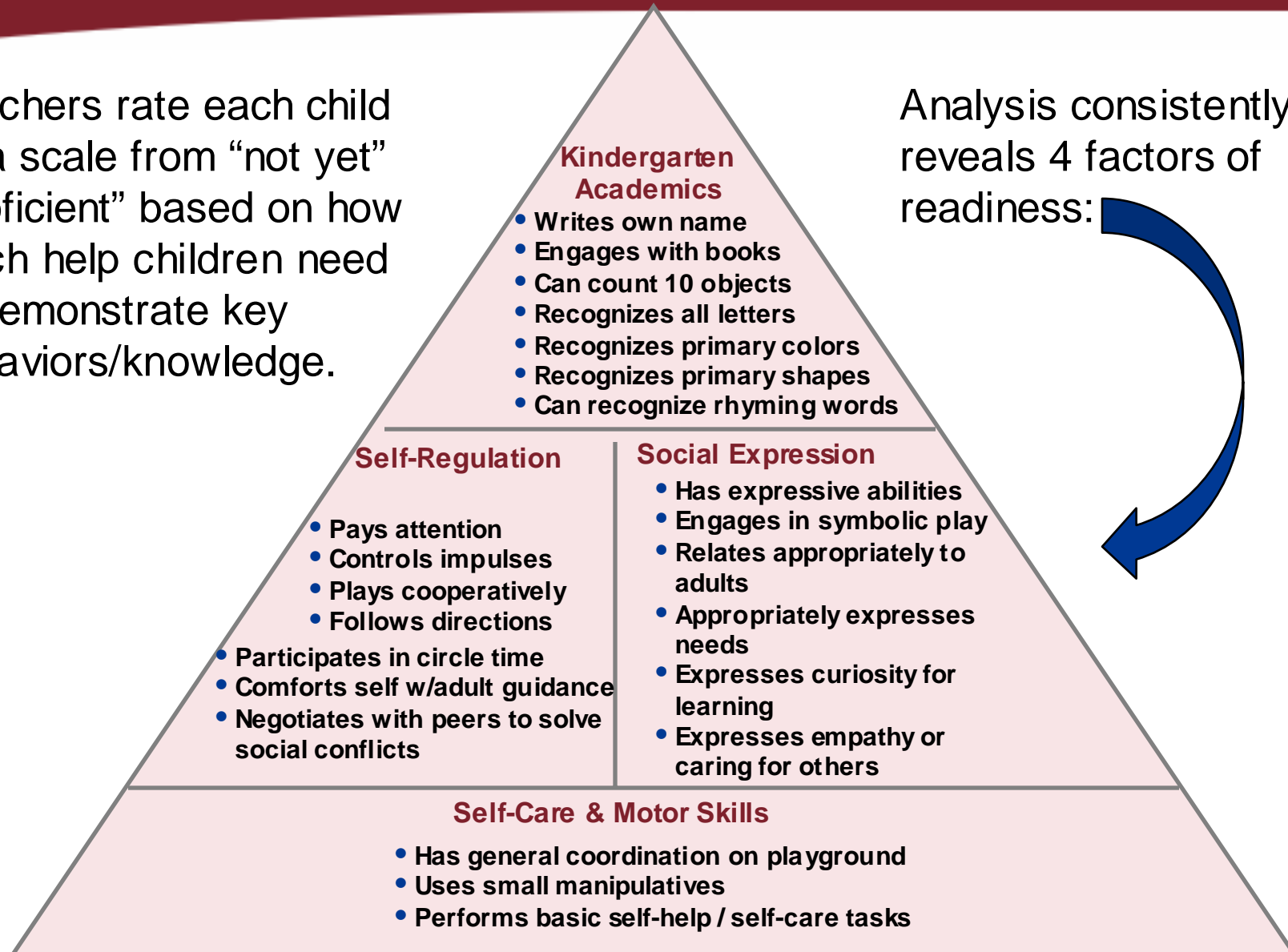
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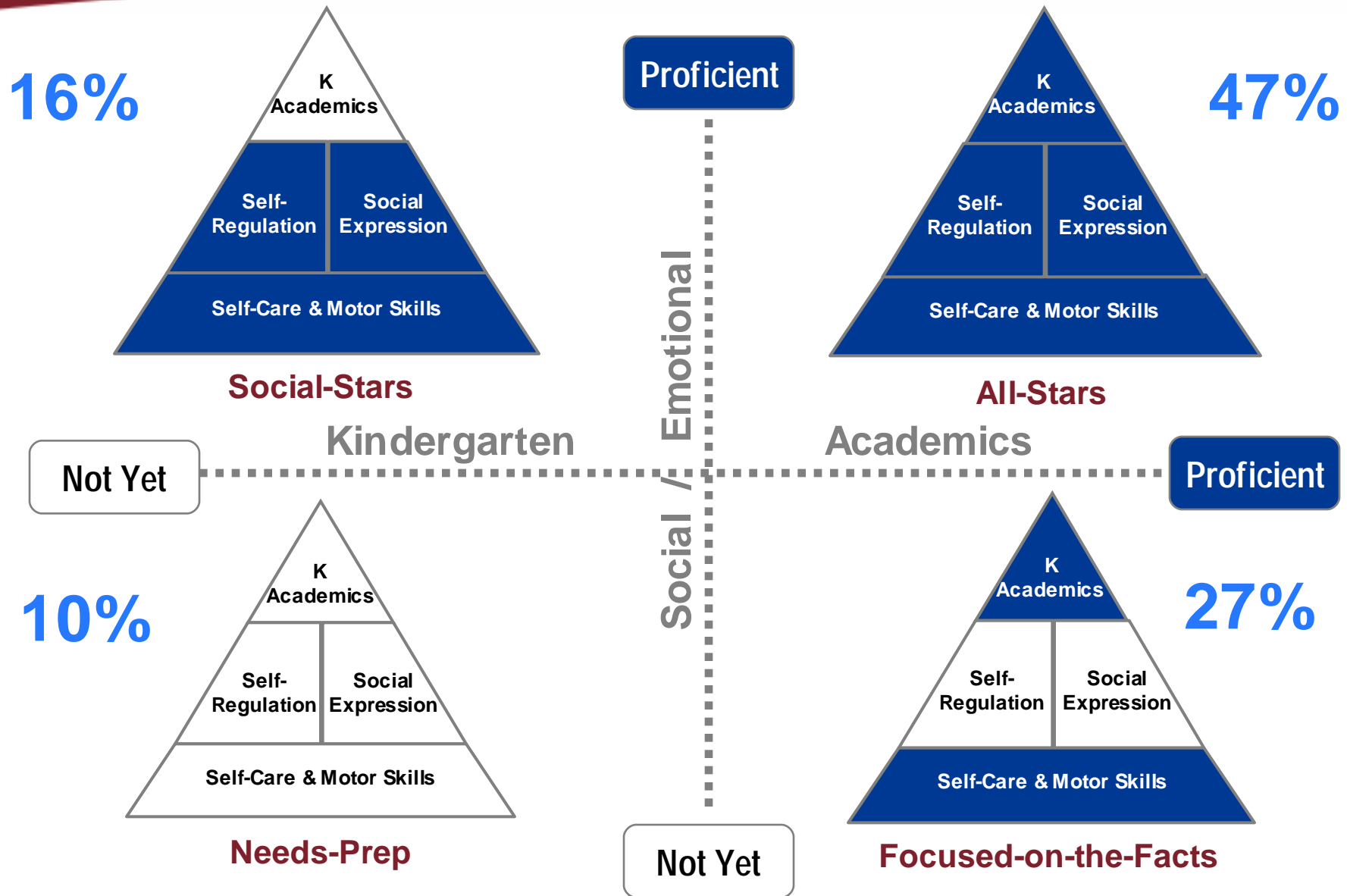
The *Basic Building Blocks* of Readiness

Teachers rate each child on a scale from "not yet" "proficient" based on how much help children need to demonstrate key behaviors/knowledge.

Analysis consistently reveals 4 factors of readiness:

Kindergarten Academics
- Writes own name
- Engages with books
- Can count 10 objects
- Recognizes all letters
- Recognizes primary colors
- Recognizes primary shapes
- Can recognize rhyming words

Self-Regulation
- Pays attention
- Controls impulses
- Plays cooperatively
- Follows directions
- Participates in circle time
- Comforts self w/adult guidance
- Negotiates with peers to solve social conflicts

Social Expression
- Has expressive abilities
- Engages in symbolic play
- Relates appropriately to adults
- Appropriately expresses needs
- Expresses curiosity for learning
- Expresses empathy or caring for others

Self-Care & Motor Skills
- Has general coordination on playground
- Uses small manipulatives
- Performs basic self-help / self-care tasks

4 *Readiness Portraits* Were Identified

16%

K Academics

Self-Regulation | Social Expression

Self-Care & Motor Skills

Social-Stars

Proficient

47%

K Academics

Self-Regulation | Social Expression

Self-Care & Motor Skills

All-Stars

Kindergarten

Academics

Social / Emotional

Not Yet

Proficient

10%

K Academics

Self-Regulation | Social Expression

Self-Care & Motor Skills

Needs-Prep

27%

K Academics

Self-Regulation | Social Expression

Self-Care & Motor Skills

Focused-on-the-Facts

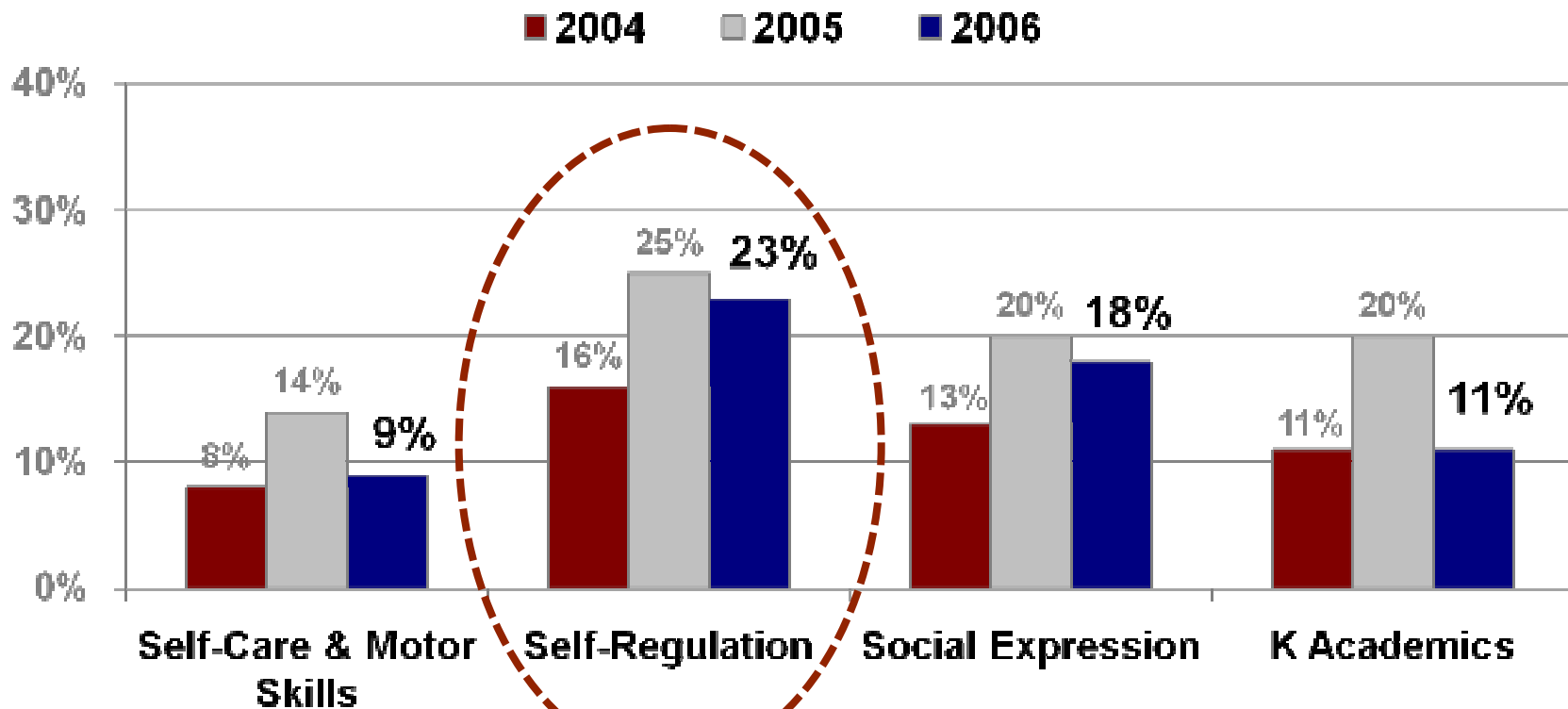**Not Yet**

Self-Regulation Skills Were Low

- **Teachers rate self-regulation skills as most critical to entry**

- **Teachers desire that children enter "in progress"**

- **Many children were far below this level**

Who Is In Greatest Need of Supports?

- **3 types of children need the greatest supports:**

  - **Needs-Prep children**

  - **Those with lower proficiency in self-regulation**
    - **1 in 4 children were significantly below teachers' desired levels of proficiency on self-regulation – a skill category that teachers viewed as critical**

  - **Those with language development needs**
    - **1 in 5 children were significantly below teachers' desired levels of language development**

27% are Needs-Prep, Low Self-Regulation, and/or Low Language

73% pose less of a concern
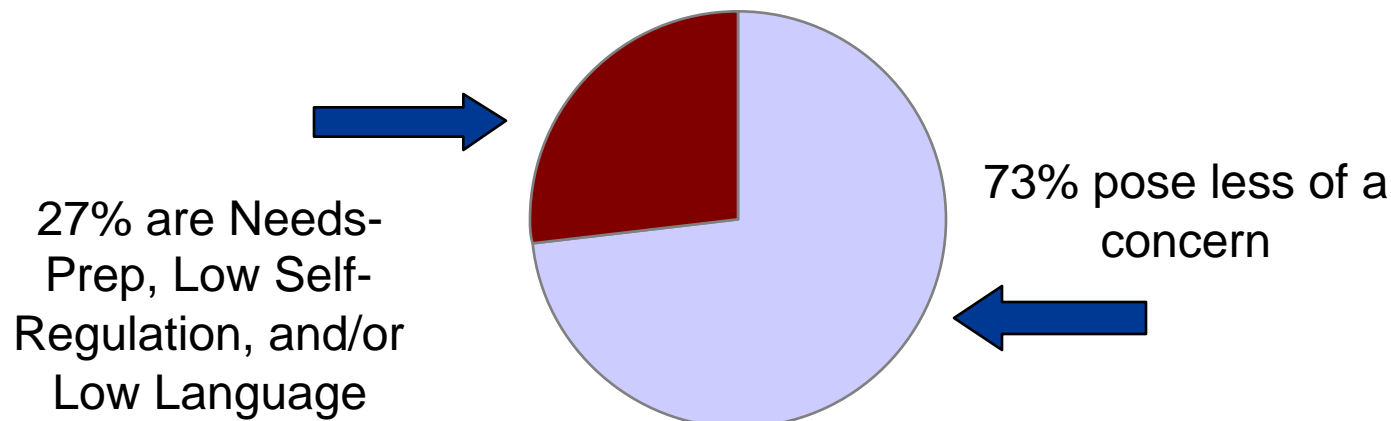
Chapter 3:

Using data to incite action around 2 pressing readiness needs

Awareness-to-Action Study Circles

- **2 groups were chartered, one to focus on self-regulation and one to focus on language development**

- **Each circle met in 5 working sessions with a diverse group of experts from the academic and provider fields**

Awareness-to-Action Process

Created a foundation of knowledge in self-regulation and language development

Developed common vision and values … and a deep understanding of the problem

Prioritized desired outcomes that would have high impact yet were feasible

Crafted a set of 6 key recommendations and associated activities for change

Currently raising awareness and advocating for the adoption of these strategies

Study Circles Examined Self-Regulation

- **Academic success requires the ability to:**
  - **Focus attention**
  - **Control impulses**
  - **Regulate emotional responses**
  - **Work within social norms**

- **Teachers say self-regulation proficiency is critical**

- **Yet 1:4 children enter kindergarten <u>far</u> below where their teachers would like them to be**

- **Children struggling with self-regulation can disrupt learning for an entire classroom**

- **Study Circles developed a self-regulation model, outlining development from birth to school-aged, parent / teacher / classroom practices, threats to healthy development**

Study Circles Examined Language Development

- **Language skills are also of central importance to success in school, and children need solid communication skills to succeed in school and life**

- **Yet …**
  - **22% of our children arrived at school with significant challenges in expressive and receptive language**
  - **In national studies, 16-22% of children have language or communication problems**
  - **45% of our children have the added challenge of learning 2 languages**
  - **English learners are at risk of delayed diagnosis of disorders and misdiagnosis as special needs**

- **Study Circles advocated that additive bilingualism is critical – efforts must support native language proficiency as well as the adoption of English**

Decision: Paradigm Shifts Were Needed

- **Language and self-regulation development is a continuous, lifelong, and interactive process**

- **Teachers also need mentoring and peer support**

- **The ability to speak more than one language is an ASSET**

- **The ECE and K-12 systems need stronger linkages**

- **Need to help children transfer learning between home and school, and between first and second languages**

These insights led to 6 recommended strategies & many key activities

6 Key Recommendations

1. **Coach and support parents and caregivers to become healthy role models for language and literacy**

2. **Cultivate mentoring and peer support networks among ECE and elementary teachers**

3. **Encourage dialog across home, childcare, preschool, elementary school, and healthcare communities**

4. **Improve the effectiveness and accessibility of language screening for all children – and of intervention for children with developmental delays**

5. **Create an interactive resource library to support these efforts**

6. **Evaluate the impact of countywide efforts**

Example Activities

- **Encourage dialog between preschool teachers and parents about language development**
  - **Create templates for parent-teacher conversations**
- **Provide easy to understand information for parents, caregivers, and teachers**
- **Identify markers of healthy language development when 2 languages are being learned**
  - **Help parents understand how to support development of English <u>AND</u> home language**
- **Create preschool environments that are "language rich"**
- **Advocate classroom practices that guide children and parents through healthy self-regulation**

A Review of Lessons Learned

- **Local data are key** to inciting concern and action

- **Broad funder-base** is critical to dissemination of results and rousing concern among a large group

- **Solid assessment methodology** created by both research and content experts – <u>and vetted by</u> teachers and the ECE community – can lead to wide acceptance

- Express **data findings simply and graphically** so that many people have an accurate understanding

- **Awareness-to-Action Study Circles** are a great vehicle to supplement local data with content expertise → development of specific, actionable recommendations

Questions?

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