

Learning from the Yamhill Early Learning Hub: Evidence for Effectiveness of the Ready for Kindergarten Workshops



Introduction & Background

Yamhill Early Learning Hub (ELH) has supported Ready for Kindergarten (R4K) workshops in seven school districts and 17 school catchment areas for over five years. R4K is an evidence-informed kindergarten readiness program designed to provide parents¹ with information and tools designed to improve a broad array of school readiness skills, including early literacy, early numeracy, and social-emotional development. R4K workshops are offered three times (fall, winter, spring), most often for children in the year before kindergarten. In Yamhill County, two school districts also offer R4K series for parents with children as young as one month old.

In 2017, as a part of the statewide evaluation of the Kindergarten Readiness Partnership and Innovation funds (KRPI), Portland State University (PSU) collaborated with the Yamhill ELH to evaluate the outcomes of the R4K program. This work sought to answer the question: **Are incoming kindergartners whose parent(s) participated in R4K during the year prior to kindergarten entry more school ready?**

Data Sources

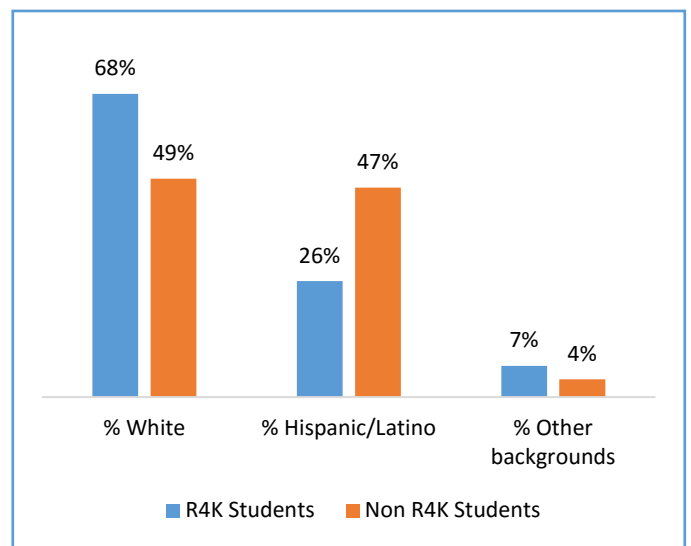
School readiness was measured with the Oregon Kindergarten Assessment (OKA). Fall 2016 OKA data were received from five school districts (Amity, Dayton, McMinnville, Newberg, and Yamhill), and included the OKA indicators of early literacy (knowledge of letter names and letter sounds), early numeracy, self-regulation skills, and interpersonal skills, as well as child's gender and race/ethnicity. For each kindergartener, schools included a data flag indicating whether or not the child's family had participated in R4K during the year before kindergarten. One large district also included information about whether the

child had been enrolled in either Head Start or another formal preschool program.

Who participates in R4K?

Across all schools, 137 children participated in R4K (13% of all incoming kindergartners). Levels of participation varied from 4% of incoming kindergartners to 26%. As shown in Figure 1 below, R4K participants were much more likely to be from Hispanic/Latino backgrounds than were students who did not participate. R4K families were also more likely to have had a child enrolled in formal PreK (73%) compared to non-participants (6%), but somewhat less likely to have been enrolled in Head Start (6% of R4K students vs. 15% of on-participants). There were no significant differences between R4K participants and non-participants in terms of the percentage of families eligible for Free/Reduced Lunch.

Figure 1. Differences Background Characteristics for R4K vs. non-R4K kindergartners



¹ The term “parent(s)” is used throughout this document, but this also includes other family or non-traditional caregivers.

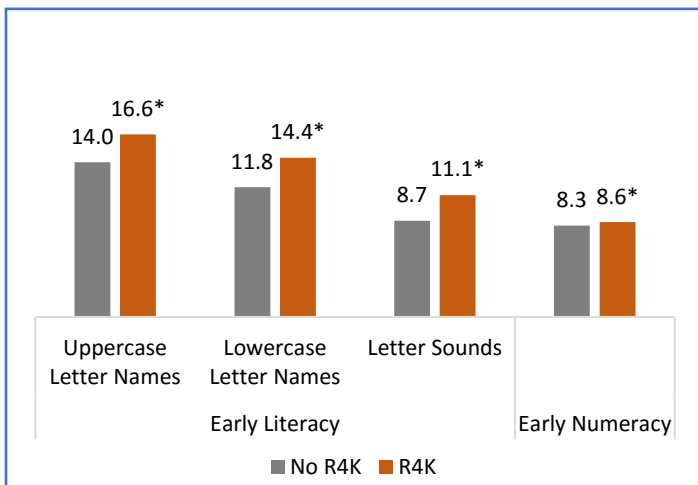
OKA Scores & R4K Participation

Research Question: Are incoming kindergartners whose parent(s) participated in R4K more school ready, as measured by the Oregon Kindergarten Assessment?

Analyses were conducted to compare OKA scores for incoming kindergartners whose parent(s) either participated in R4K or did not, controlling for differences in background characteristics. Results found that students whose parents were in R4K (Figure 2):

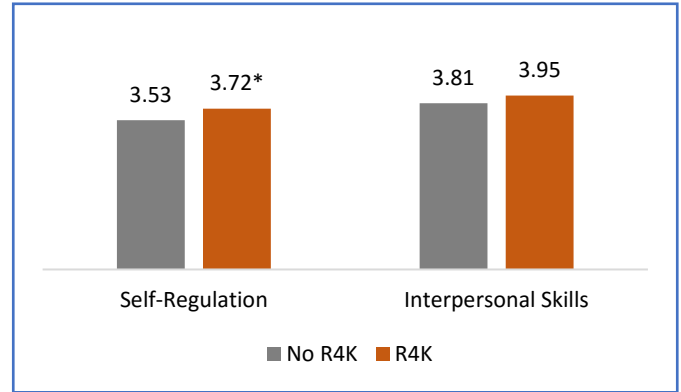
- Identified significantly more upper and lowercase letter names,
- Knew significantly more letter sounds, and
- Had significantly better early numeracy skills

Figure 2. Average Early Literacy & Early Numeracy Scores by Participation in R4K



Further, as shown in Figure 3, **children whose families participated in R4K scored significantly higher self-regulation scores than those who did not**, although differences were small. There was no significant relationship between participating in R4K and teacher's ratings of children's interpersonal skills. That said, the primary focus of the R4K program is on early academic skills and other skills parents can directly support at home; the opportunity for facilitated work to build interpersonal skills (e.g., through social interactions with other children) is fairly minimal.

Figure 3. Average Approaches to Learning Scores by Participation in R4K



Conclusions & Limitations

The results of these analyses suggested positive benefits for children whose families participated in R4K. While encouraging, these findings should be interpreted in the context of several important caveats. Most importantly, comparisons of OKA scores were made between families who voluntarily decided to participate and those who did not. Comparing demographic characteristics of these two groups of families, it is apparent that there are differences in those who choose to attend the program. On the positive sides, R4K families were much more likely to be Hispanic/Latino, suggesting the program is doing a good job at outreach to this community. Hispanic and Latino children statewide start school with lower OKA scores, especially in early literacy and early numeracy. On the other hand, R4K participants were somewhat more likely to have attended a non-Head Start preschool. This may be related to how programs are publicized, but also suggests there may be families who would benefit from R4K who are not being reached. Finally, there may be other family characteristics that were not measured that contribute to positive outcomes. For example, it is possible that, among other things, families who attended the R4K sessions are generally more proactive about getting the resources that they and their children need to be ready for and succeed in school. More research is needed to continue to build the evidence base for this promising approach to improving school readiness.