

E3 Spotlight: Our Early Warning Has Sounded

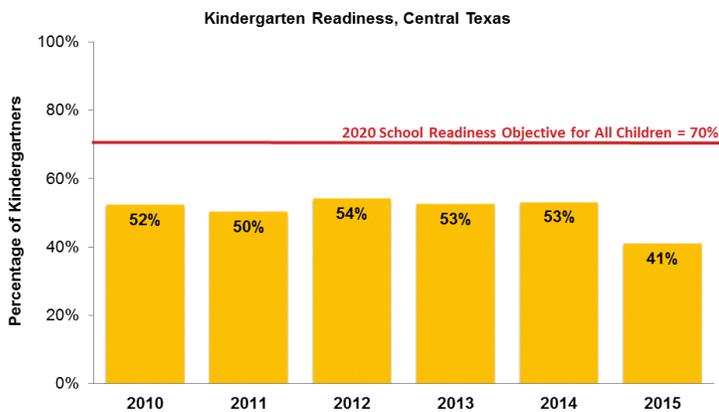
Kindergarten Readiness Drops Across the Region

The Challenge

Being ready for Kindergarten is of the most important metrics for success, and ensure that our students are on track for reading at grade level at third grade. For six years, E3 Alliance has tracked Kindergarten Readiness in Central Texas using the most comprehensive, student-centered readiness standard in the state. This year, our early warning system has sounded: **significantly fewer students are ready for school this year than they have been in the previous 5 years.**

Compelling Data

Kindergarten Readiness Rate Dropped in 2015



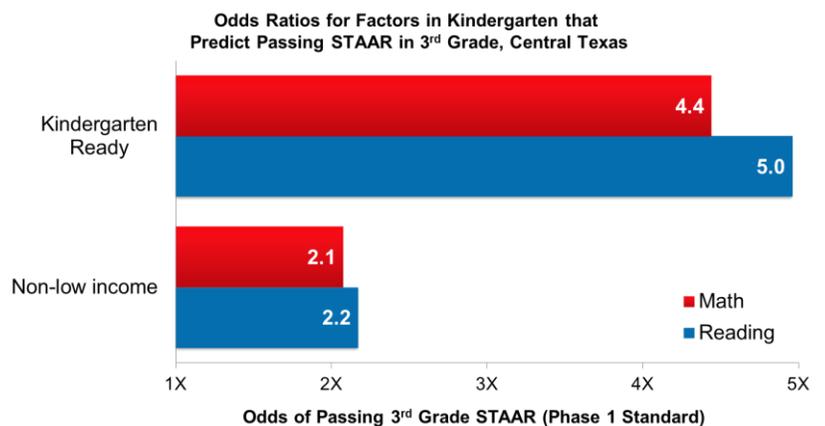
Source: E3 Alliance Analysis of Ready,Set,K! weighted data

From 2010 to 2014, student readiness for school in Central Texas was quite stable, with just over half of students ready for school. School readiness is assessed based on early literacy, early numeracy, language and communication and social and emotional skills. The ability to maintain a consistent level of student readiness is viewed as positive given our regional challenges over the last several years. Even in the face of challenges based on recent demographics changes, Central Texas school districts were able to maintain student readiness. This year, however, the regional percentage of students ready for Kindergarten dropped significantly, from **53% to 41%**. As a region, we must understand the factors related to this drop, and we must take rapid and comprehensive action to help these students succeed.

School Readiness Highly Predictive of Third Grade Performance

Ready,Set,K! is a formative assessment that measures Kindergarten readiness and a progress monitoring tool for Pre-K teachers to ensure children are on track. Children are rated in Pre-K and Kindergarten, and we are able to longitudinally track student scores into third grade. This has given us critical information about the relationship between being ready for Kindergarten and how that may impact later school success:

- Kindergarten Assessment results are highly predictive of both reading and math success in 3rd grade.
- Kindergartners are 4.4 to 5 times more likely to pass their 3rd grade STAAR if they were ready for school
- Kindergarten readiness was more predictive of third grade success than any demographic factor, such as income status.



E3 Alliance analysis of Ready,Set,K! and data at the Education Research Center at UT Austin; odds ratios from model with income, ELL, gender, ethnicity, Kinder ready status as predictors; Kindergarten in 2011-12

What Caused the Drop?

Though we cannot definitively determine the cause of this year's drop in readiness, significant quantitative and qualitative investigation lead to two potential overarching factors: student enrollment demographics and a marked drop in early childhood support services.

Student Enrollment Demographics:

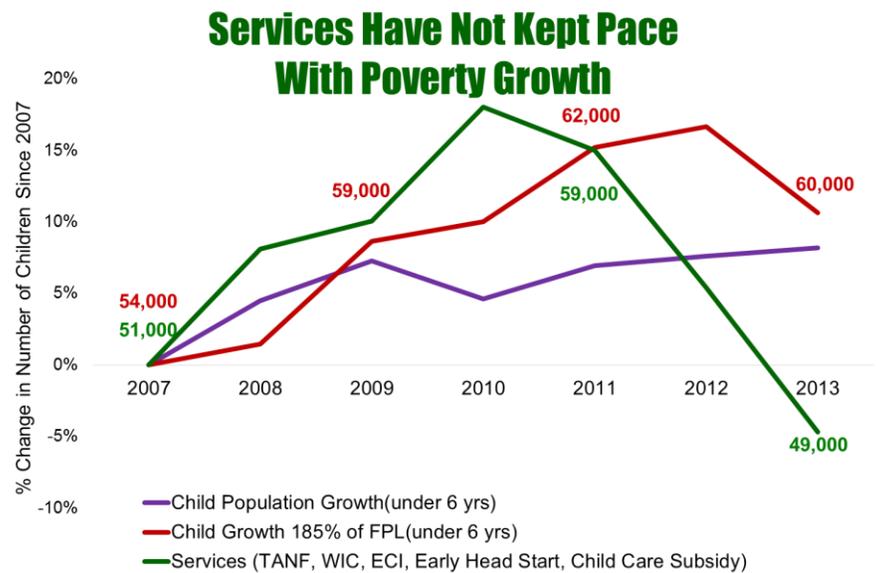
We see two primary changes in the makeup of students:

- In our economically disadvantaged school population (those whose families earn less than 185% of the federal poverty level) we have seen a shift, in that more students are meeting the free lunch guidelines (130% of the FPL or less) versus students that are between 130-185% who qualify for reduced price lunches. This corresponds with data that show our population in poverty increasing at a faster rate than our non-poverty population.
- Among students who were in a Pre-K program the year before kindergarten, a smaller proportion of English Language Learners (ELLs) attended in 2015 (83%) compared to the 5 prior years (90-93%). E3 Alliance research indicates that after taking into account other demographic factors, attending Pre-K increases the likelihood that a student is ready for Kindergarten by a factor of four.

However, neither of these shifts are enough to explain the significant drop in readiness we are seeing.

Drop in Early Childhood Support Services:

We know that the 2015-16 class of Kindergarten students had far less access to federal, state, and local services in their formative 0-3 years that could have helped support readiness. As the following graphic shows, the Central Texas child population has increased substantially relative to 2007, as has the rate of growth of children in poverty. In contrast, the number of children served through state and federal programs such as Early Childhood Intervention, Early Head Start, Child Care Subsidy supports, Temporary Assistance to Needy Families and the Women, Infant and Children nutrition program decreased significantly during 2010 through 2013, when 2015's Kindergarten cohort would have been 0-3. In fact the potential service gap between the number of low income children under 6 eligible for services versus the number who actually received federal and state services would have been nearly 3,000 children in 2007. In 2013, the potential service gap would have been 11,000 children.



Building the Common Agenda

Our early warning system shows a clear correlational link between lack of access to these early services and lack of school readiness at age five. To avoid having a significantly smaller proportion of Central Texas students ready for Kindergarten in future years, our region and our state need to come together with a common voice to improve access to critical services for our youngest children. While children's brains go through the most rapid development of their lifetime - from zero to age three - we must ensure that they have the supports they need for healthy development.

But that is not enough. Without significant and rapid intervention, *our 2015-16 Kindergartners are far less likely to be reading or completing math on grade level by 2018-19 in 3rd grade than any class now in our elementary schools.* In fact, without a significant change in interventions and supports, our research shows that 1000 fewer students are likely to pass reading and/or math 3rd grade assessments in 2019 compared to our current 3rd grade class. National research shows that the longer we wait, the more costly those interventions will be. Without focused, concentrated regional intervention now, the current Kindergarten class has a much higher risk of not reading at grade level, leading to lower graduation rates and lower post-secondary completion. Never before have we had data to act this early or this decisively to impact our children's educational future.