



LISTENING TO ALASKAN FAMILIES:

PERSPECTIVES ON A STATEWIDE DEFINITION
OF KINDERGARTEN READINESS, FALL 2025

ONETEAM TWO COMPANIES

DENALIDANIELS + ASSOCIATES ALASKA SURVEY RESEARCH

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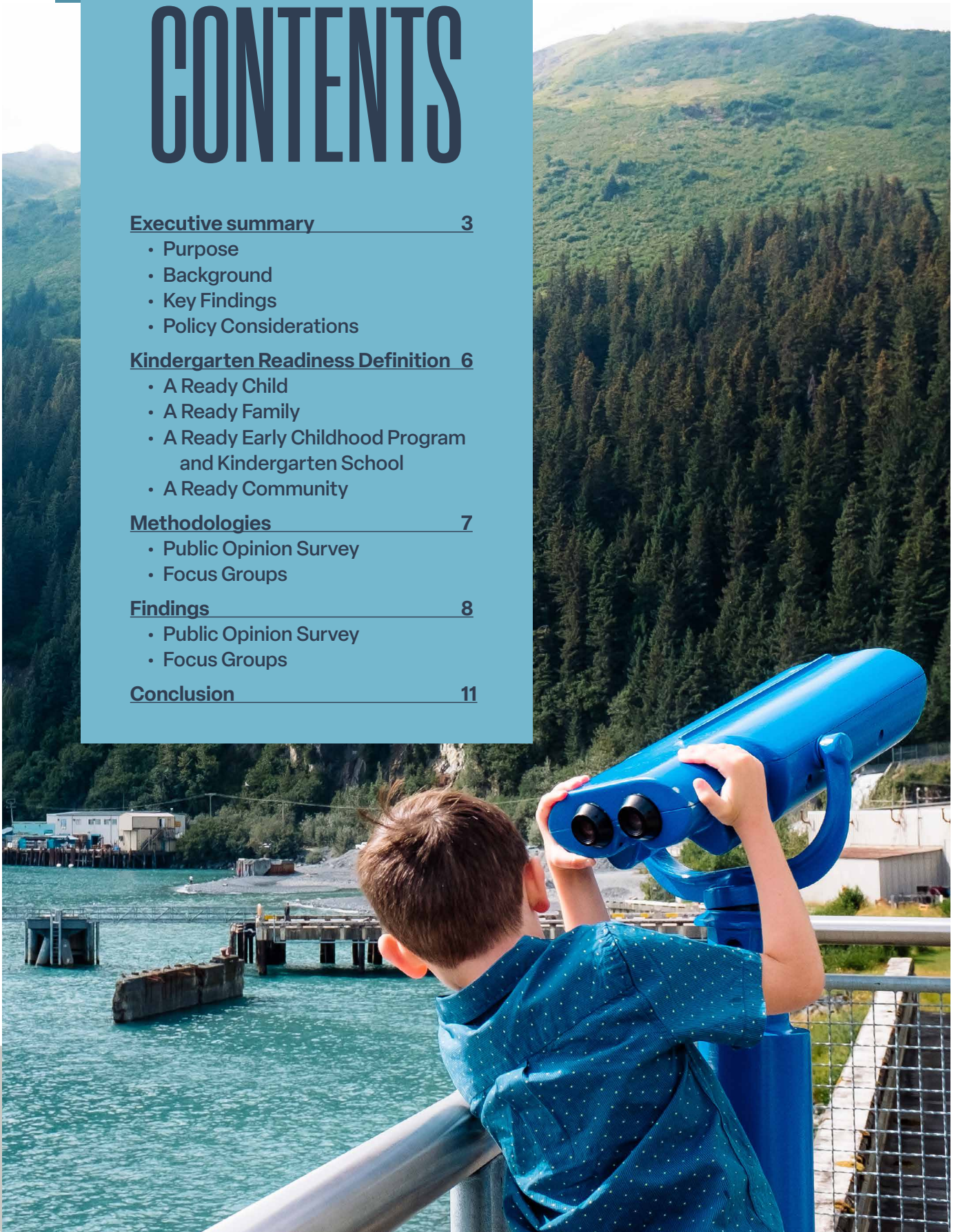
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

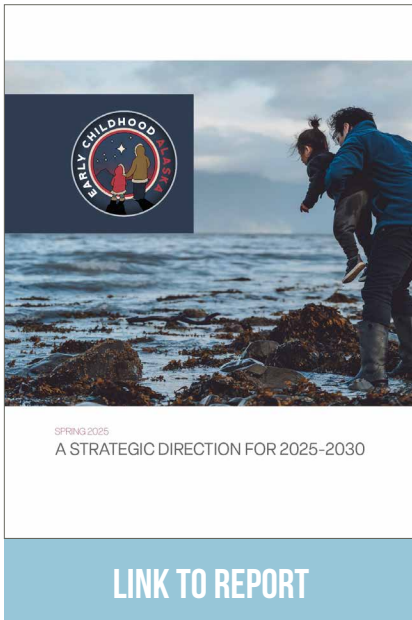
PURPOSE

Provide an overview of findings from the research conducted to gather family input on the drafted statewide definition of kindergarten readiness.

BACKGROUND

This research was conducted in direct response to ***Early Childhood Alaska: A Strategic Direction for 2025-2030***, which identifies kindergarten readiness as a key priority for strengthening early learning outcomes in Alaska.

Prior to this research, a work group of early childhood professionals drafted a definition with four sections: A Ready Child, A Ready Family, A Ready Early Childhood Program and Kindergarten School, and A Ready Community. The previous work recognized the need for family voice and input to inform the definition. Since then, the definition underwent slight edits in an effort to make it more “family-friendly.” The following research was conducted on the family-friendly definition, which follows the executive summary of this report.



Within the Strategic Direction, Objective 6: Transitions emphasizes shared understanding, communication, and family guidance to support children as they prepare for kindergarten and enter the K–12 system.

The Strategic Direction calls to:

- 6.1.a: Complete and publicize the statewide kindergarten readiness definition.
- 6.1.b: Establish a statewide workgroup to propose shared definitions of system-wide terms, including but not limited to kindergarten readiness, quality, and high-quality programs.

A shared, statewide definition of kindergarten readiness is foundational to these expectations. The 2025 Strategic Direction includes activity language calling for agreement on and public communication of a kindergarten readiness definition that families, early childhood programs, schools, and communities can use consistently.

This study included a statewide survey and focus groups with families from diverse communities across Alaska. Families reviewed the draft kindergarten readiness definition and provided feedback on clarity, relevance, and usefulness as a guide for supporting children’s development and readiness for kindergarten.



KEY FINDINGS

- Families across Alaska expressed strong support for the kindergarten readiness definition and viewed it as accurate, affirming, and helpful.
- Families understood the definition as a guide to support children's growth across developmental domains, not as a checklist or a barrier to kindergarten entry.
- Levels of agreement exceeded expectations, indicating the definition is well understood by families and ready to inform next phases of work.
- Feedback highlighted the importance of clear guidance that situates kindergarten readiness within early development more broadly, including how families, schools, and communities support readiness over time.

POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

Overall, support for the definition is strong. The data supports the adoption of the definition as is by early learning providers and other agencies that serve children preparing for and transitioning into kindergarten.

Approaches to formally approving or adopting kindergarten readiness definitions vary across states and may include legislation, regulation, administrative action, or other mechanisms. Determining the most appropriate pathway for Alaska was beyond the scope of this research. Adopting a statewide policy will require leadership and decision-making by advocates, policymakers, and system partners.

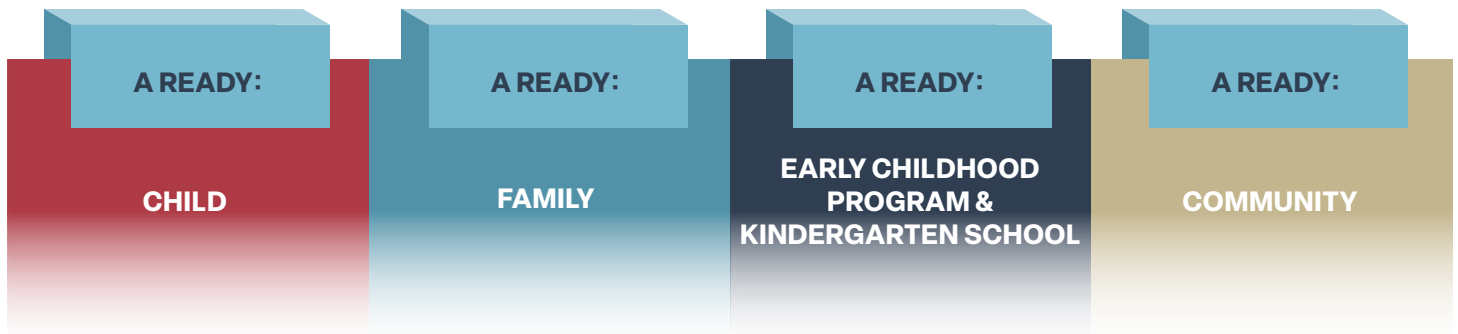
Based on the findings, future efforts may include:

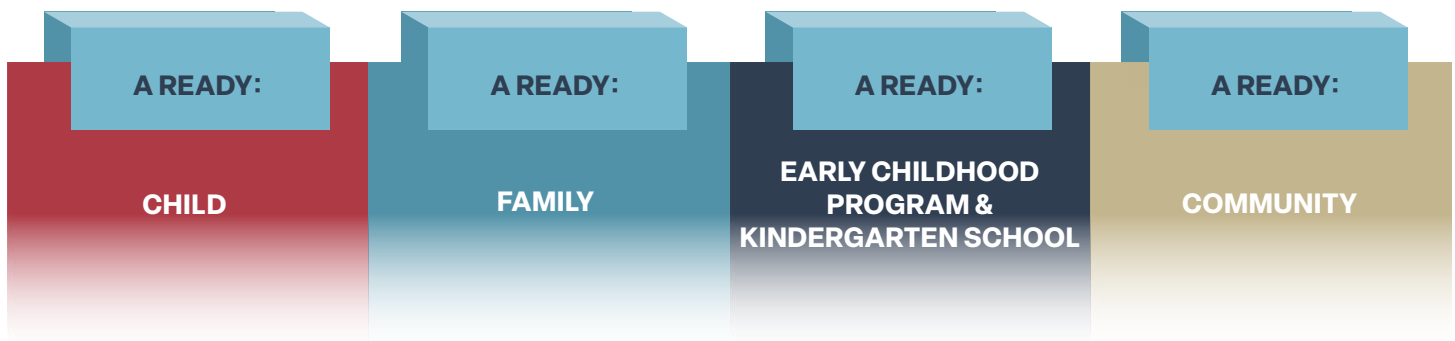
- Recognizing the kindergarten readiness definition as complete and validated by families
- Identifying an appropriate pathway for formal approval or endorsement
- Public communication, advocacy and implementation once a pathway is established
- Developing family-facing resources with information surrounding transition activities
- Developing guidance for educators and families to support consistent use of the definition
- Aligning kindergarten readiness efforts across early learning and K-12 systems

DEFINITION

KINDERGARTEN READINESS

In Alaska, children, families, and communities walk together on the journey of lifelong learning and growth. Our shared goal is to help children and families make a positive and smooth transition into kindergarten. “Kindergarten ready” is not meant to hold children back or delay their entry. Every child and family has unique strengths and areas where they are growing. This definition is simply a guide for families, schools, and communities to support children as they take their first big step into kindergarten.





A READY CHILD

- Moves safely, uses hands and fingers to play and explore.
- Can join group activities by using self-control and focus.
- Makes friends and asks adults for help when needed.
- Shows curiosity, likes learning new things, and tries to solve problems.
- Pays attention and stays with activities even when they're hard.
- Can count to 20 and count objects up to 10.
- Sorts and organizes toys and objects.
- Listens, shares needs with words or gestures, and responds to others.
- Understands ideas like sizes, opposites, and where things are.
- Enjoys books, stories, and storytelling.
- Recognizes letters and their sounds.
- Plays with sounds in spoken words.
- Understands that spoken words can be written and may try writing.
- Grows at their own pace, with children engaging in ways that work best for them.

A READY FAMILY

- Gives their child safe, loving relationships and a healthy environment.
- Encourages curiosity and a love of learning.
- Knows about and joins kindergarten transition activities.
- Understands their child's needs and speaks up for them.

A READY EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAM & KINDERGARTEN SCHOOL

- Builds caring, personal relationships so every child feels safe, noticed, and part of the school community.
- Recognizes that parents and families are a child's first and most important lifelong teachers.
- Supports the whole child when creating learning spaces.
- Has skilled, caring teachers who meet children where they are.
- Uses teaching that is culturally respectful and responsive to families.
- Builds early literacy through proven reading practices.
- Works together to host meaningful kindergarten transition activities.
- Teams up with the community to share resources with children and families.
- Partners with parents to support each child's growth and milestones.

A READY COMMUNITY

- Ensures families have access to quality education, safe homes, jobs, transportation, healthy food, physical activity, and health care.
- Connects families with resources, builds community, and invests in the future.
- Understands that strong early learning programs are connected to success in K–12 and beyond.

METHODOLOGIES

PUBLIC OPINION SURVEY

A public opinion survey was conducted in October 2025 to gauge public perception of the definition. This representative survey was fielded via text and email and amassed a total sample size of 2,083 Alaskan adults. Of this total sample, 334 were parents, guardians, or immediate caregivers of a child aged 3-8 and expressed some level of interest in providing feedback on the definition of Kindergarten Readiness.

This survey gathered respondent feedback on each of the four sections of the definition ("A Ready Child",

"A Ready Family", "A Ready Early Childhood Education Program and Kindergarten School", and "A Ready Community"), as well as level of agreement with the 30 individual bullets that compose the definition. This process provides a quantitative measurement for both overall perception and individual attitudes to the statewide definition of Kindergarten Readiness.

First, respondents were presented with each section of the definition and responded via a 5-point graphic slider showing happy, neutral, and

unhappy faces.

Then, each statement within the definition was slightly edited to be presented in an agree/disagree format to test perceptions of specific statements. This 5-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree" was recoded such that a score of 0 represents "strongly disagree" responses, and a score of 4 represents "strongly agree" responses. Thus, a mean score analogous to an academic 4.0 GPA scale is used for comparison.

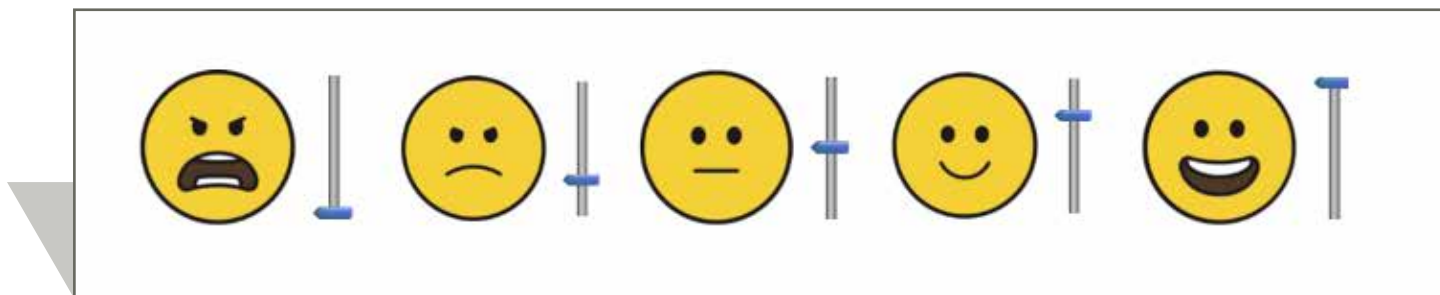


Figure one

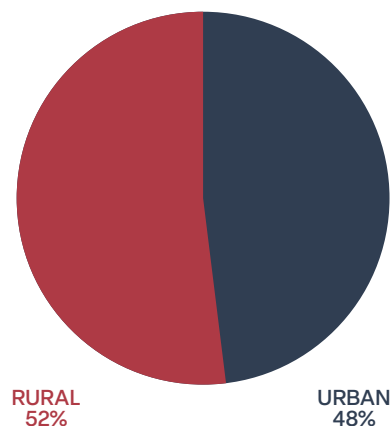
FOCUS GROUPS

Three focus groups were conducted with a similar audience of parents, guardians, or immediate caregivers of children aged 3-8. These focus groups gathered qualitative data, presenting each of the four sections of the definition and asking respondents what stood out to them.

The main recruitment goal was to provide a wide geographic spread

with representation from various urban and rural communities across Alaska. The result was a 48%/52% split of urban and rural respondents, respectively.

A sentiment analysis was conducted from the corpus of transcripts from these three focus groups, and further thematic analysis was conducted within the sentiment groupings.

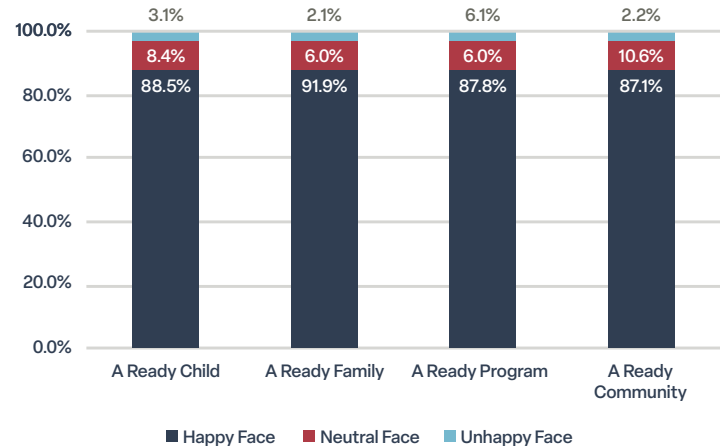


FINDINGS

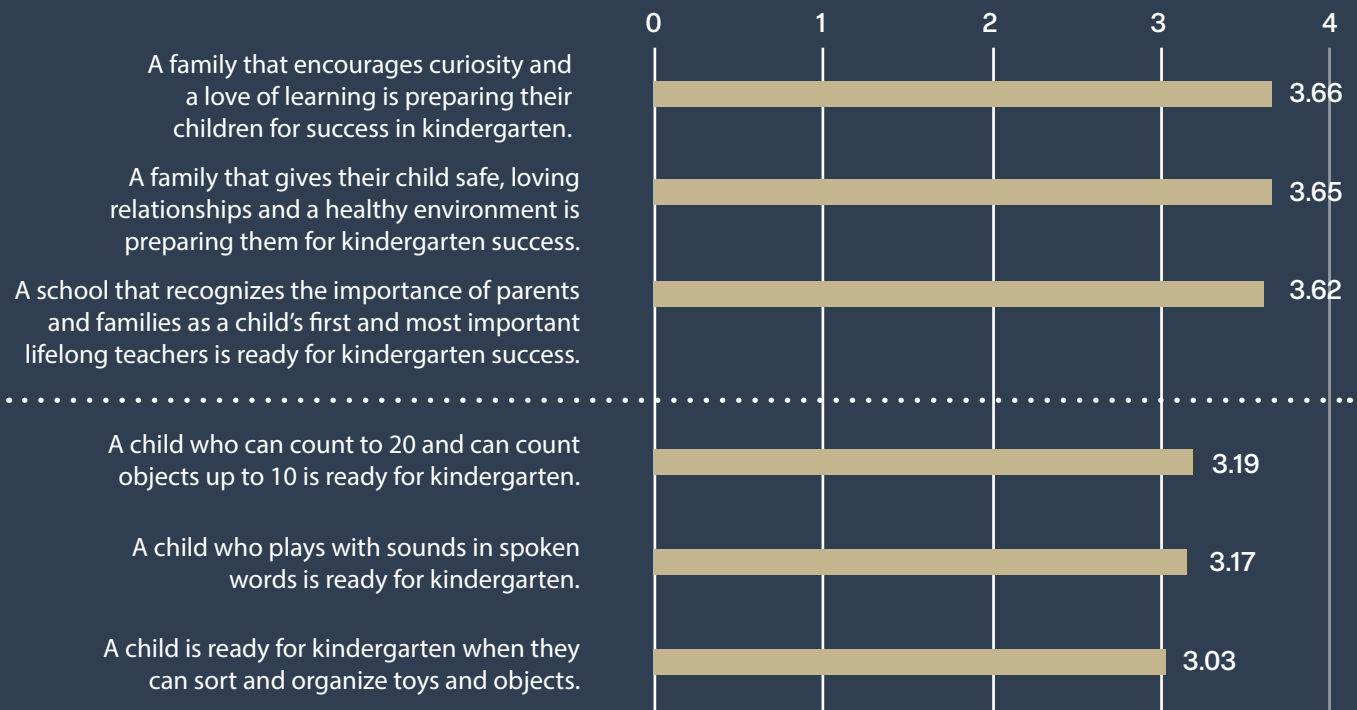
OVERALL, SUPPORT FOR THE DEFINITION AS WRITTEN WAS STRONG AMONGST RESPONDENTS. BOTH QUANTITATIVE SURVEY RESULTS AND QUALITATIVE FOCUS GROUP ANALYSIS SUPPORT THIS CLAIM.

PUBLIC OPINION SURVEY

In response to “A Ready Child” on the public opinion survey, 88.5% of respondents selected a “happy face” response. “A Ready Family” received stronger support, with 91.9% of respondents selecting a “happy face” response. 87.8% of respondents selected a “happy face” in response to “A Ready Early Childhood Education Program and Kindergarten School”, and 87.1% selected a “happy face” in response to “A Ready Community”.



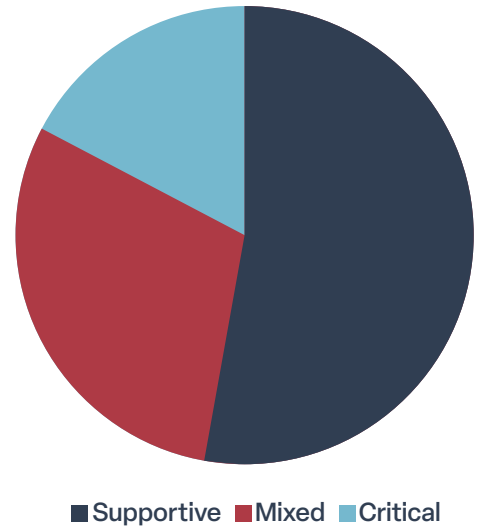
The statement that received the strongest sense of agreement, “A family that encourages curiosity and a love of learning is preparing their children for success in kindergarten,” had a mean score of 3.66. The lowest mean score of these 30 bullets was 3.03, in response to the statement “A child is ready for Kindergarten when they can sort and organize toys and objects.” Overall, all statements received a level of agreement akin to a B average at least.



More details can be found in the attached Survey Report.

FOCUS GROUPS

Focus group analysis strengthened these results. 134 statements stood out as either supportive, mixed, or critical in regard to the definition of Kindergarten Readiness. Of these statements, 53% were identified as supportive, 30% expressed support with some feedback, and 17% were critical.



THEMES

Themes were then identified within the sentiment groupings to identify trends and considerations for the next steps of publicizing and utilizing the definition. Themes found in the supportive statements were:

RECOGNITION OF THE "WHOLE CHILD"

"I like the statement about the learning space, how they it aims to support the whole child... You know, it doesn't just focus on the academic part of the student [but] focuses on the holistic approach. And I like that idea."

RECOGNITION OF THE FAMILY ROLE

"I really like, the part where it recognizes that, the parents are the child's first and most important teachers."

"IT TAKES A VILLAGE"

"I like how it involves the whole community in the teaching and learning of the child. Not just the family or just the school or just the teachers but the bigger community in the child's success."

EMPHASIS ON RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

"I liked the first one, which was building caring, personal relationships so every child feels safe, noticed, and a part of the school community. I do think that's important."

THEMES CONTINUED

Themes identified in the mixed statements were:

IDEAL VS. REALITY	"These are the ideal, "perfect world" scenario, but doesn't seem realistic. I do feel that a ready community would have these things to set children up for success."
THE NEED FOR ACCOUNTABILITY	"I like this. But it feels like there could be something around accountability from the community. I'm missing where the 'how' is from all these definitions. I'm not sure all of these definitions are achievable in all communities across the state."
THE NEED FOR SPECIFICITY	"The bulletin about kindergarten transition activities is a little vague for me. What activities?"

Themes recognized in the critical statements were:

CONFUSION ABOUT "TRANSITION ACTIVITIES"	"That there is not enough information out there about kindergarten transition activities!"
CRITIQUE OF ACADEMIC STANDARDS / NOT ENOUGH PLAY	"The list emphasizes compliance-oriented behaviors, which are school centric and not developmentally emergent. These traits develop from rich play experiences, not prerequisites for them. This framing shifts early learning from exploration to performance. It's missing core play dimensions, which risks turning kindergarten readiness into early schooling and not early learning."
ISSUES OF EQUITY	"I want to know more about how they would intend to push this information to the public - where and how are these resources and activities expected to be available in all communities? How will those communities be prepared? How are these programs and communities held accountable to these baselines?"
MISSING ELEMENT	"I do think parents also have a big role in the academic development, which doesn't seem reflected..."

More details and quotes to support each theme can be found in the attached Focus Group Report.



CONCLUSION

OVERALL, RESEARCH FOUND SUPPORT FOR THE DEFINITION AS WRITTEN TO BE STRONG.

This is supported in the quantitative data, where overall attitudes were resoundingly happy and agreement with individual parts of the definition remained strong. This support is strengthened by the qualitative data, where the supportive statements more than triple those that were critical.

The key takeaway from the mixed and critical qualitative data was the need for more information regarding "transition activities". Families participating in these focus groups

expressed the need for clear and concise information, with established avenues to find out more about how to participate.

Finally, we see some clear considerations when it comes to messaging around this definition. Families might feel more supported if this is presented as a 'wish list' rather than a 'checklist'. Moreover, acknowledgment of the community aspects at play will be vital when disseminating this definition.

This research demonstrates strong alignment between Alaska families' perspectives and advances a vision for adopting a shared definition of kindergarten readiness in Alaska. With the definition validated by families and strong public support established, Alaska is well positioned to determine next steps toward approval and implementation that support children's development, strengthen family engagement, and promote positive entry into kindergarten statewide.





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