



Pre-Kindergarten Program Outcomes: Kindergarten Readiness

February 2026

Pre-K
GWINNETT COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS



This is the first in a series of research briefs on the topic of GCPS' Pre-Kindergarten Program Outcomes. This report provides a general history of the GCPS Pre-K Program, including selection processes and overall demographics. This report also explores kindergarten readiness as a universal measure of student preparedness for academic learning and focuses on program participants between SY2022-23 to SY2024-25.

Overview

Within Gwinnett County, GA, families have access to several early learning environments including roughly 7,000 lottery-funded Georgia Pre-K slots, as well as Head Start, private Pre-K, and the Gwinnett County Public Schools (GCPS) Early Childhood Special Education programs. In combination, these resources are designed to serve at least 60% of the county's 10,000+ four-year-olds. However, Kindergarten Readiness Entry Profile (KREP) data showed that fewer than half (46% in SY2021, 49% in SY2022) of GCPS' incoming kindergarteners met the district's kindergarten readiness benchmarks, suggesting a gap between pre-kindergarten experiences and actual kindergarten preparedness. This indicates a persistent challenge in early childhood preparedness, despite the availability of multiple Pre-K programs aimed at supporting school readiness.

To address the gap in kindergarten readiness, in SY2023 the GCPS Early Learning and School Readiness (ELSR) team launched a school-based Pre-K Program in eight Title I elementary schools: Anderson-Livsey, Beaver Ridge, Benefield, Hopkins, Lawrenceville, McKendree, Nesbit, and Norton. Over 1,000 students have participated in the GCPS Pre-K Program since its inception.

This brief explores the effectiveness of the GCPS Pre-K Program by analyzing students' KREP scores in relation to themselves and other GCPS kindergarteners.

Key Question

How does offering a GCPS Pre-K Program in certain schools increase those students' kindergarten readiness, on average, compared to their peers in the same school and across the district?

Highlights

- GCPS Pre-K students showed strong growth, with far more children entering kindergarten ready than when they began Pre-K.
- Students made clear, positive gains on KREP by the end of the Pre-K year.
- GCPS Pre-K kindergarteners outperformed their peers, with higher readiness rates than both their schools and the district overall.
- GCPS Pre-K kindergarteners posted substantially higher KREP scores than other kindergarteners at their schools and across the district.

Key Terms

Kindergarten Readiness

Kindergarten readiness is the state in which a child possesses the foundational skills, behaviors, and social-emotional development needed to successfully engage in and benefit from a formal kindergarten learning environment. Students earning 70% or higher on KREP are considered “kindergarten ready.”

KREP

The Kindergarten Readiness Entry Profile (KREP) is an individually administered screener, developed by GCPS teachers and administrators to assess kindergarten readiness. Its purpose is to provide staff with formative information about the performance levels for incoming kindergarteners. The information is used to guide instruction and determine the kindergarten readiness of students entering GCPS schools.

Pre-K Program Students

Pre-K Program students are students who enrolled in a GCPS general education pre-kindergarten class in one of the eight participating elementary schools. Each participating elementary school offers two GCPS Pre-K Program classrooms.

Pre-K Kindergarteners

Pre-K Kindergarteners are students who participated in a GCPS Pre-K Program classroom during the year prior to entering kindergarten. These students completed one year of GCPS general education pre-kindergarten at a participating school before enrolling in kindergarten at the same or another GCPS elementary school.

Non-Program Peers

Non-program peers are students who enrolled in kindergarten at any of the eight GCPS Pre-K Program schools but did not attend the GCPS Pre-K Program.

Non-Program Schools

Non-program schools are GCPS elementary schools that do not offer a GCPS Pre-K Program classroom.

The GCPS Pre-K Program Model

The ELSR team implemented high-quality¹, school-based general education Pre-K classrooms in eight Title I elementary schools. These classrooms are led by credentialed teachers and paraprofessionals and are designed to provide developmentally appropriate instruction aligned with the Georgia Early Learning and Development Standards (GELDS). The initiative builds on GCPS’ experience with flagship [early learning programs](#) such as Play 2 Learn and the Early Childhood Special Education Program, both of which have been successfully offered in GCPS elementary schools for several years.

The GCPS Pre-K Program represents a strategic effort to improve kindergarten readiness (see Key Terms) by expanding access to high-quality early learning experiences in underserved communities. By leveraging existing expertise and infrastructure, the ELSR team aimed to close the readiness gap and support long-term academic success for the county’s youngest learners.

Core components of the GCPS Pre-K Program include:

- 1. Full-Day, School-Based Delivery Model**
 - a. Full-day schedule with purposeful logistics (e.g., room location, transition times)
 - b. Prescribed lesson plans and assessments tailored to developmental standards
 - c. Focus on developmental growth rather than traditional K-1 content standards
 - d. Small-class ratios of 16:2
- 2. Age-appropriate Curriculum and Assessment**
 - a. Curricular alignment with GELDS and use of play-based instructional models
 - b. KREP used to assess readiness at program entry and exit
 - c. Waterford Early Learning supplemental curriculum with interactive lessons and adaptive diagnostic tools
- 3. Access and Equity**
 - a. Priority enrollment for students zoned to participating schools
 - b. Transportation and meals (breakfast and lunch) provided to promote equitable access
- 4. Instructional Quality**
 - a. Staffed by credentialed teachers and paraprofessionals
 - b. Competitive compensation and ongoing professional development
 - c. Collaboration between pre-kindergarten and elementary school leadership teams to ensure instructional alignment and support

GCPS Pre-K Program Schools and Students

The GCPS Pre-K Program was launched to expand access to high-quality early childhood experiences in communities where data consistently indicate lower levels of kindergarten readiness. District leaders sought to identify schools where a Pre-K investment would provide the greatest impact on long-term student outcomes, using a combination of quantitative data, operational feasibility, and community needs.

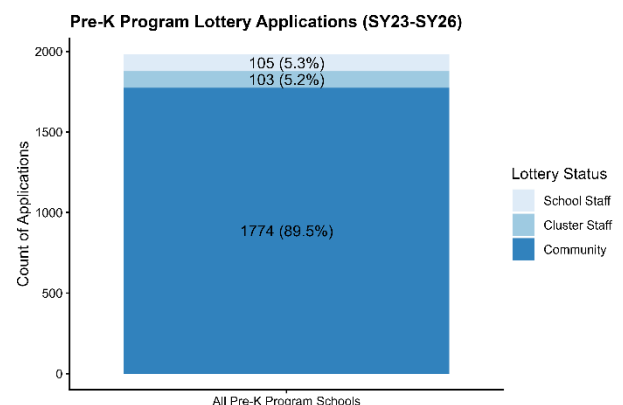
Selection of Pre-K Program Schools. Eight Title I elementary schools were designated as GCPS Pre-K Program sites. In a district where approximately 60% of elementary schools receive Title I funding, targeting these schools aligns with GCPS’s commitment to equitably deploying resources and supports. By situating Pre-K classrooms in Title I schools, the program provides early learning opportunities to families who are most likely to benefit from additional academic, social, and developmental supports. School selection was informed by several interrelated criteria:

1. **Available Space and Facility Requirements.** Each school needed space to create two dedicated Pre-K classrooms, ideally situated near existing kindergarten wings to promote alignment between early learning environments and to ensure minimal transitions throughout the school day. Schools were encouraged to consider whether the physical layout supported safe and accessible routes between the classrooms and critical spaces such as the cafeteria, playground, and bus or car rider lanes. Ensuring short, manageable travel distances was an important design principle for young learners.
2. **Kindergarten Readiness Entry Profile (KREP) Scores.** KREP data served as a foundational indicator of need. Schools in which historically large numbers of kindergarteners enter school classified as “not ready” on KREP were considered for the program. By situating Pre-K classrooms in these schools, the district aimed to bolster early learning foundations before students formally enter the K–12 system.
3. **Early Childhood Need Indicators (GEEARS Early Childhood Index).** The GEEARS Early Childhood Index—a composite measure of parental education, low birthweight rates, access to quality childcare, and poverty—provided additional insight into community-level early childhood vulnerabilities². These data helped identify communities where children were most likely to benefit from additional early learning resources. Schools serving census tracts with higher need scores were prioritized to ensure that the Pre-K expansion aligned program placement with community need.
4. **Cluster Representation and Geographic Coverage.** GCPS leaders intentionally distributed Pre-K classrooms across multiple clusters to increase access for families across the district, reduce transportation and enrollment barriers, and serve high-need communities in diverse geographic regions. This approach ensured the program’s reach extended beyond a single cluster or subset of neighborhoods.

Selection of Pre-K Program Students. The GCPS Pre-K Program serves a diverse group of young learners across eight elementary schools. To date, the Pre-K Program has received nearly 2,000 applications (see Figure 1) and enrolled over 1,000 students. Student enrollment is designed to prioritize access for families within each school community while supporting a high-quality, mixed-income early learning environment shown to benefit all children. The program uses a lottery-based admissions system to ensure fairness, transparency, and equitable opportunity.

1. **Student Eligibility.** Enrollment is open to two primary groups of students: (1) children living in the attendance zone of a GCPS Pre-K Program school, and (2) children of GCPS employees who either work at the Pre-K Program school, or work within the same cluster as the program school. This two-path eligibility model supports both community access and staff recruitment/retention goals.
2. **Lottery Application Process.** The GCPS Pre-K Program uses an annual online lottery system to determine student placement. The application window opens in mid-March and remains available through mid-April, giving families approximately one month to submit their materials. The lottery is conducted in late April, and families are notified of their lottery results within one week. Once notified, families have a two-week window to accept their seat; if they decline or do not respond by the deadline, the seat is offered to the next eligible student on the school’s waitlist.

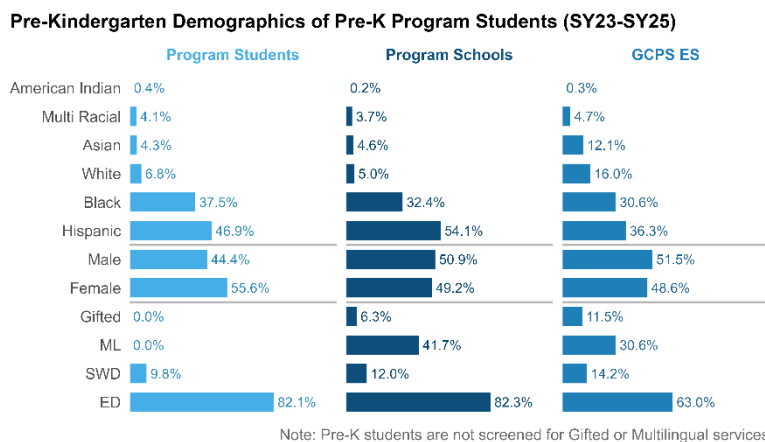
Figure 1: Pre-K Program lottery applications show continued demand for the program



3. **Weighted Lottery Structure.** When applications in each lottery group exceed available seats—32 total seats per school—each school uses a weighted admissions lottery:
 - a. Priority Group 1: Children of staff working at the school (4 available seats per school)
 - b. Priority Group 2: Children of staff working in the school’s cluster (4 available seats per school)
 - c. Priority Group 3: Community applicants living in the school’s attendance zone (24 available seats per school)
 Each lottery group is run sequentially, triggered only if the number of applicants exceeds the number of seats allotted for that lottery group.
4. **Reserved Seats for Staff Children.** At each school, eight seats are prioritized for staff children (either school-level or cluster-level). Unfilled staff seats are given to waitlisted community applicants; however, two unfilled staff seats are held throughout the summer for summer hires. Once the school year begins, any unfilled staff seats are offered to students on the community waitlist. The reserved seats serve several critical purposes such as classroom composition, school staff recruitment and retention, and transportation needs. Staff children add to the diversity of a classroom. In terms of staff recruitment and retention, guaranteed access to high-quality Pre-K serves as a valuable benefit for GCPS employees and can support both hiring and job satisfaction. Finally, staff children are not provided with bus transportation unless they reside in the program school’s attendance zone. In contrast, transportation is guaranteed for community applicants, which further supports enrollment of high-needs families.
5. **Verification Procedures.** To maintain integrity and fairness in the selection process, GCPS conducts a desk audit of all lottery applications: Address verification ensures applicants live within the correct attendance zone; Birthdate verification confirms age eligibility; and Employee status verification determines whether a child qualifies for placement in Priority Group 1 or Priority Group 2 of the lottery. Only after verification are students assigned to the appropriate lottery group.

School and Student Demographics. Demographic analyses of the GCPS Pre-K Program indicate that the lottery process has produced a student population that is representative of the larger school communities in which the program is housed. Across the eight program schools, the demographic profiles of Pre-K students closely mirror those of the broader student body, particularly in areas such as racial and ethnic distributions, the percentage of students classified as economically disadvantaged, and the proportion of students receiving special education services (see Figure 2). These similarities suggest that the program is effectively reaching the populations it was designed to serve.

Figure 2: The demographics of Pre-K Program students closely mirror their program schools in several key areas



Notable differences emerge in categories such as Gifted and Multilingual learners; however, these differences reflect developmental and procedural realities rather than system-level inequities. Pre-kindergarten students are not screened for gifted services, as gifted referrals typically start as early as kindergarten, once teachers have access to early academic indicators such as kindergarten i-Ready results. Likewise, pre-kindergarten students do not participate in the ACCESS assessment, the state-required measure used to identify and classify multilingual learners in grades K–12. As a result, no Pre-K students would be formally identified as gifted or multilingual during their pre-kindergarten year, and lower representation in these areas is both expected and appropriate. These factors should be considered when interpreting demographic comparisons between Pre-K participants and the broader school population.

The GCPS Kindergarten Readiness Entry Profile

The Kindergarten Readiness Entry Profile (KREP) (see Key Terms) is GCPS’ 24-item assessment designed to measure the foundational skills children need as they enter kindergarten. Administered directly by trained examiners, KREP evaluates students across the five developmental domains of the Georgia Early Learning and Development Standards (GELDS): (1) Cognitive Development and General Knowledge, (2) Communication, Language and Literacy, (3) Physical Development and Motor Skills, (4) Social and Emotional Development, and (5) Approaches to Play and Learning. The assessment is delivered in two parts. KREP Part 1 is typically completed soon after kindergarten registration—often in the late spring or summer before school begins—or, for students in the GCPS Pre-K

Program, it is administered at the end of their Pre-K year. KREP Part 2 is given during the first three weeks of kindergarten. Students who enroll during the first three weeks complete both parts regardless of their registration date, helping ensure teachers receive a complete readiness profile.

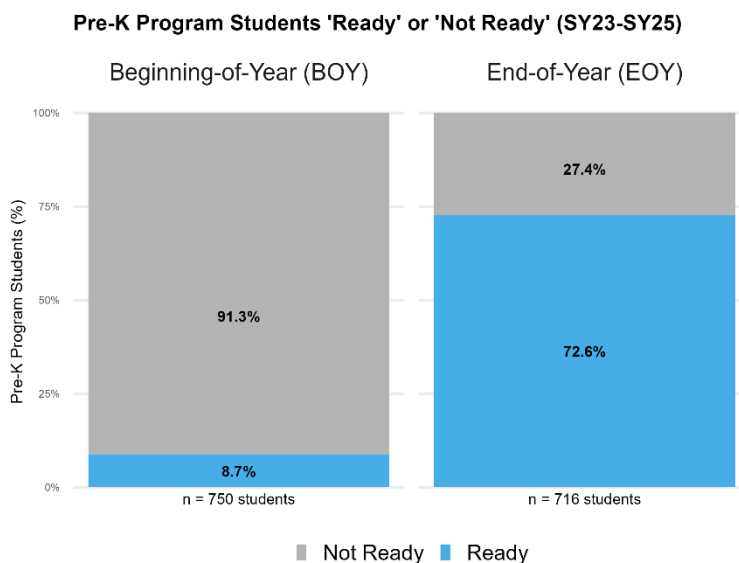
Each year, more than 10,000 kindergarten students complete KREP, providing a comprehensive snapshot of academic and social emotional readiness across the district. Results play a key role in shaping instructional planning, informing class roster decisions, and supporting teachers in preparing developmentally responsive learning environments. A student is considered “ready for kindergarten” by KREP standards if they score at least 70%, indicating adequate preparation for both the classroom environment and the kindergarten curriculum.

Readiness: Pre-K Program Students’ End-of-Year KREP Gains

One of the primary metrics tracked by the ELSR team is student performance on KREP. The assessment is administered to GCPS Pre-K Program students (see Key Terms) at two points during the school year: at the Beginning-of-Year (BOY) and at the End-of-Year (EOY). The purpose of the pre- and post-tests is to measure student growth and progress toward kindergarten readiness after participating in the Pre-K Program.

While pre- and post-test results show a substantial increase in students demonstrating readiness, it is important to note that KREP is designed for 5-year-olds entering kindergarten. Because the pre-test is administered to 4-year-old pre-kindergarteners, lower baseline scores are expected. Growth observed by the end of the Pre-K Program reflects both program influence and the natural developmental progression toward the assessment’s intended age target.

Figure 3: A vast majority of Pre-K Program students were considered “ready” for kindergarten by the end of the program



Increase in Kindergarten Readiness. The percentage of program students classified as “ready for kindergarten” rose from 8.7% at BOY to 72.6% by EOY (Figure 3). The data show strong developmental gains among Pre-K Program students over the course of the school year. Results are based on non-paired scores, meaning analyses were not limited to students with both BOY and EOY scores. Because KREP is administered only at specific times during the school year, students who enroll after the BOY KREP is given do not receive a BOY score, and students who withdraw before EOY administration typically do not have an EOY score unless they reenroll in a GCPS elementary school. Even with these constraints, the pattern of results is clear: students who participated in the Pre-K Program demonstrated substantial increases in kindergarten readiness by EOY.

Program year, more students meet the kindergarten readiness threshold than did at the start of the year. This trend is further supported by the rise in average KREP performance, with Pre-K students increasing from an average score of 44% at BOY to an average of 76.3% at EOY—an improvement of more than 30 percentage points (Table 1).

These strong EOY averages mean that a typical Pre-K student in GCPS, scoring at or near the program’s average, would meet the 70% threshold required to be considered “ready for kindergarten” by EOY. Although students’ readiness levels are much higher on the EOY scores than on the BOY scores, these differences should be interpreted in context. KREP is a kindergarten readiness assessment created for 5-year-olds, meaning the BOY pre-test is effectively a kindergarten benchmark given to 4-year-olds. As a result, increases in readiness reflect not only the program’s meaningful impact for participating students, but also children’s normal developmental movement toward the age for which the assessment was designed.

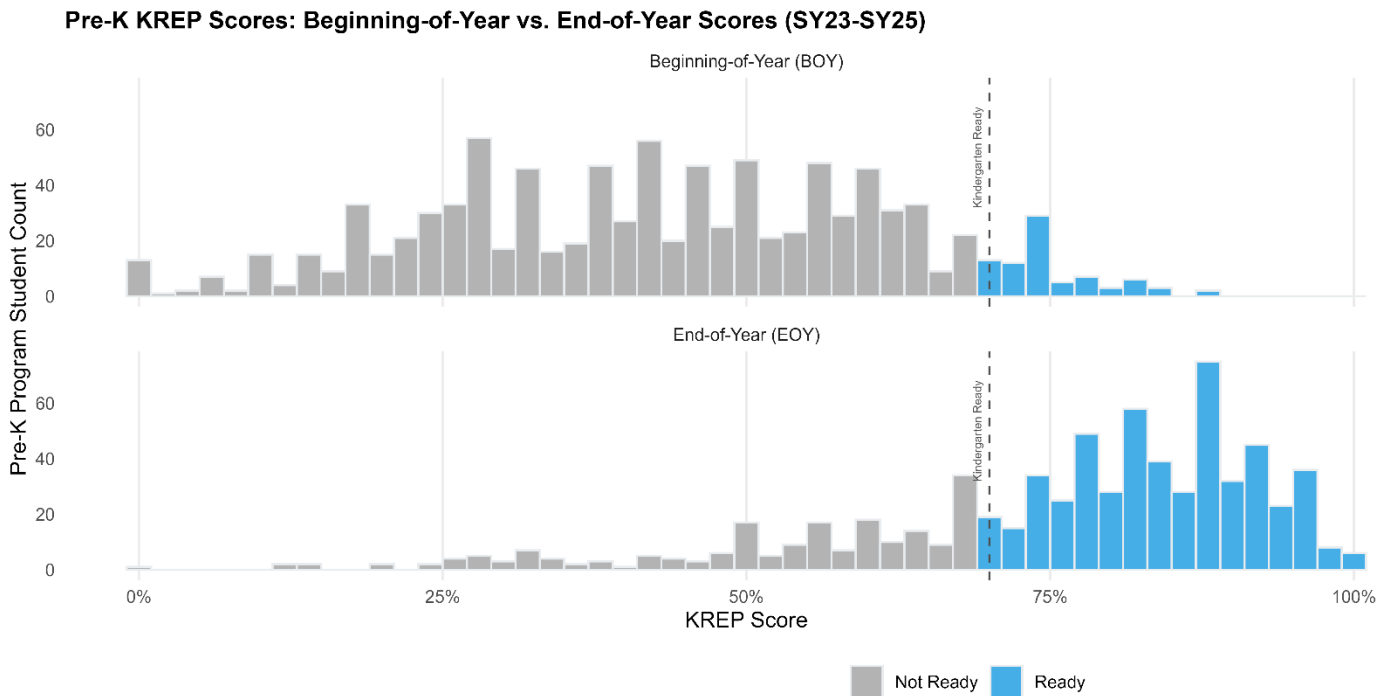
Positive Gains in EOY Scores. By the end of the Pre-K

Table 1: Pre-K Program students demonstrated a large, positive gain from BOY to EOY average scores

| Average BOY Score | Average EOY Score | Average Difference Between Scores |
|-------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 44.0% | 76.3% | +31.5 |

Significant Growth in Readiness. EOY scores were substantially higher than BOY scores, indicating strong developmental progress during the Pre-K year. The significant growth in readiness observed from BOY to EOY reflects not only higher scores but also a much larger proportion of students meeting readiness expectations (Figure 4). This growth combines the two earlier findings: many more students are not only meeting the “ready” benchmark but are doing so with higher overall performance. These results indicate that the Pre-K Program is effectively preparing students for kindergarten, equipping them with the academic, social emotional, and developmental skills needed to enter school confident and well-prepared to access the kindergarten curriculum.

Figure 4: Pre-K Program students’ KREP scores increased substantially by the end of their program year



These results demonstrate that participation in the GCPS Pre-K Program significantly enhanced students’ readiness for kindergarten, aligning with the program’s goal of supporting early learning and school readiness.

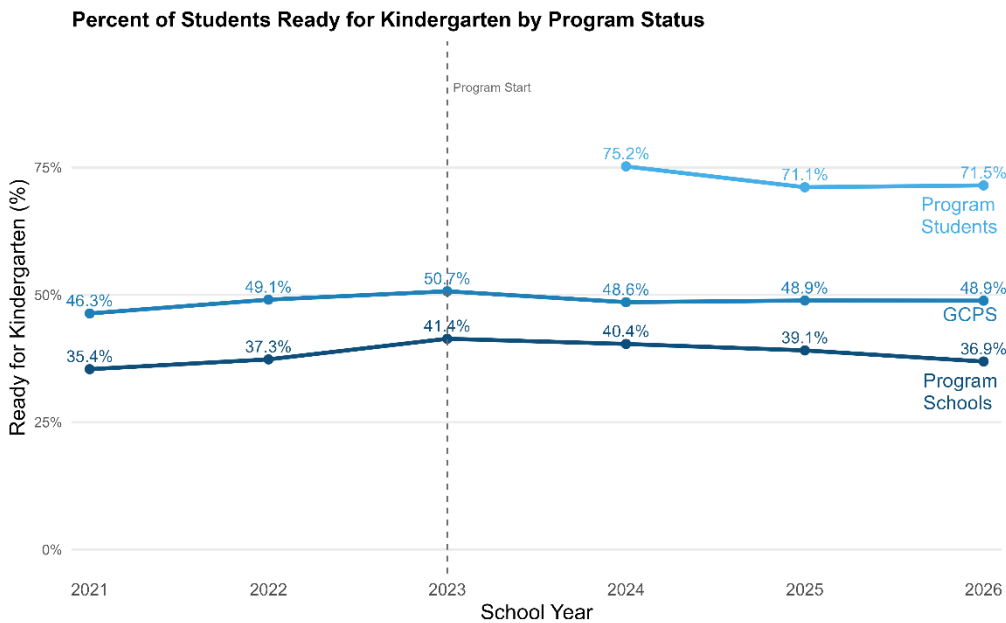
Readiness: Pre-K Program Students Compared to Other Kindergarteners

Across the eight Pre-K Program schools, 37.3% of kindergarteners met the “ready for kindergarten” benchmark in SY2022—the year before the Pre-K Program started—compared to 49.1% across the entire district. The eight schools chosen to implement the GCPS Pre-K Program in SY2023 were selected, in part, because of their comparatively lower rates of kindergarten readiness.

Analysis of kindergarten readiness and early performance outcomes indicates that students who participated in the district’s Pre-K Program entered kindergarten much better prepared than other kindergarteners within the same schools. This pattern holds both within the eight elementary schools that offer the GCPS Pre-K Program and when compared to kindergarteners districtwide.

Higher Readiness Rates Overall. A noticeably larger proportion of GCPS Pre-K Program students demonstrated readiness, compared to their non-program peers (see Key Terms) in the same schools as well as across the district (Figure 5). Figure 5 shows the kindergarten readiness rates for Pre-K Program students, the eight program schools, and the entire district, from SY2021 through SY2026. Since the launch of the GCPS Pre-K Program in SY2023, the district has closely tracked the kindergarten readiness outcomes of each subsequent cohort, beginning with their entry into kindergarten in SY2024. Across the first three years, the data consistently show higher readiness rates among students who participated in the Pre-K Program compared to their peers both within program schools and across the district. Despite a lower overall readiness rate across all eight program schools, the readiness rates of Pre-K Program kindergarteners consistently exceed both their school peers and the district average. Over 70% of Pre-K Program students were kindergarten-ready, compared to their program school’s average readiness rate of about 40% or less.

Figure 5: Pre-K Program kindergarteners exhibit higher overall readiness rates compared to other kindergarteners



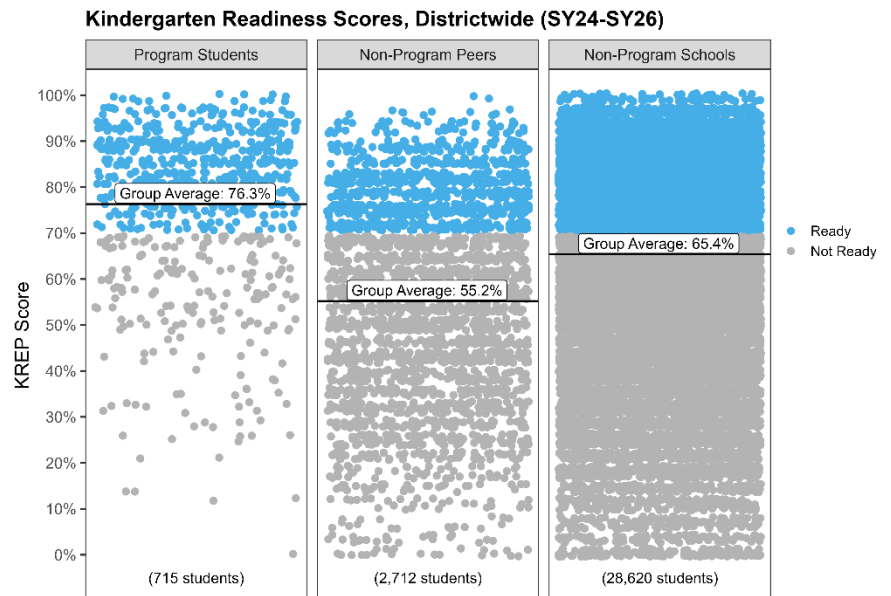
This finding is particularly meaningful because the eight program sites were intentionally selected from communities with historically lower kindergarten readiness levels, and the program is achieving its mission of improving outcomes in those areas.

It is also important to note that although Pre-K Program students outperform their peers within program schools, the overall readiness rates at Pre-K Program schools have not increased. These trends could be indicative of enrollment patterns rather than program impact: Pre-K Program students make up no more than 20% of a given kindergarten cohort at program schools. Some Pre-K Program families withdraw from

GCPS before kindergarten, while others remain in GCPS but enroll in non-program elementary schools (see Key Terms). Such mobility is not new, especially for Title I schools. Each program school is a Title I elementary school. Six of the eight program schools have SY2025 mobility rates exceeding 25%, according to GOSA’s downloadable data³. Despite these contextual challenges, the strong readiness rates among children who complete the Pre-K Program represent a clear success of the initiative.

Higher Average Scores Overall. Pre-K Program students scored substantially higher on KREP than their non-program peers within the same schools, as well as across the district (Figure 6). On average, students who attended the GCPS Pre-K Program score 76.3% on KREP—well above the 70% benchmark required to be considered “ready for kindergarten.” This level of performance exceeds that of kindergarteners in the same schools who did not attend the GCPS Pre-K Program, whose average KREP score over the past three years (SY2024–SY2026) is 55.2%, below the readiness threshold. Similarly, outside the eight program schools, the districtwide three-year average for kindergarteners on KREP is 65.4%, also below the readiness bar. These differences show that the program is not only increasing the share of students who meet readiness expectations but is doing so at a level higher than what is observed across the district. In short, the Pre-K Program is successfully preparing students with the foundational skills necessary to thrive in kindergarten, and its participants are entering school better prepared—both academically and developmentally—than their peers.

Figure 6: Pre-K Program kindergarteners achieved higher overall KREP scores compared to other kindergarteners



Collectively, these findings suggest that the Pre-K Program is positively associated with stronger kindergarten readiness outcomes. GCPS Pre-K Program students consistently outperformed both their non-program peers in the same schools and kindergarteners across the district, indicating promising early impacts of the program on school readiness.

Conclusions and Next Steps

The findings from this analysis suggest that the GCPS Pre-K Program is achieving several of its core goals in supporting early learning and school readiness. It is important to interpret the findings by considering several contextual factors.

First, we see a clear **increase in kindergarten readiness**, with substantially more Pre-K Program students meeting readiness benchmarks at the end of their Pre-K year than at the beginning. This improvement aligns with one of the program’s central ambitions—to ensure more children enter kindergarten equipped with the foundational skills they need for success.

Second, not only are more students “ready,” but they are also achieving **higher and stronger scores on the KREP assessment** by year’s end. In other words, the program is not merely helping students cross the readiness threshold; it is positioning them to start kindergarten with greater confidence, stronger academic skills, and deeper developmental preparedness.

Third, the data show **significant growth in readiness** from BOY to EOY, demonstrating meaningful developmental progress over the course of the Pre-K year. This growth reflects both higher overall performance and a larger share of students achieving readiness expectations, reinforcing the substantial impact of early learning experiences. However, it is important to remember that KREP is designed for 5-year-olds entering kindergarten, and lower pre-test scores among 4-year-old Pre-K students are expected. Improvements observed by the end of the Pre-K year likely reflect a combination of program influence and natural developmental progression toward the assessment’s intended age range.

Fourth, **higher readiness rates overall** among Pre-K Program students highlight the program’s value within schools and across the district. Students who participated in the Pre-K Program consistently demonstrated readiness at rates exceeding those of their peers—both within program sites and systemwide—indicating that the program is expanding access to high-quality early learning in communities where readiness rates have historically lagged. Although Pre-K Program students outperform their peers within program schools, overall readiness rates at those schools have not increased. These trends may be shaped by enrollment patterns, shifts in the student population, or challenges facing Title I schools, making it difficult to attribute schoolwide changes—or lack thereof—directly to the program.

Finally, we observe **higher average KREP scores overall**, with Pre-K Program students outperforming their non-program peers. These higher scores underscore the program’s effectiveness in strengthening early academic and developmental competencies that directly support kindergarten success.

Together, these findings illustrate a clear narrative: the GCPS Pre-K Program is fostering measurable, meaningful gains in school readiness and helping ensure that program students begin kindergarten with the skills they need to thrive. The observed gains are promising, yet they exist alongside important limitations regarding assessment design, demographic context, and school-level conditions. These considerations highlight the need for continued study to better understand the program’s specific contributions, as well as how early learning experiences may shape students’ trajectories as they enter and progress through elementary school.

In the next brief in this series, we will examine kindergarten i-Ready performance as an additional marker of early academic achievement and analyze Waterford’s Early Learning diagnostic data to provide richer context for understanding students’ developmental trajectories. This forthcoming analysis will offer insight into how Pre-K Program participation influences both early literacy and numeracy development and will help illuminate the broader impact of the program on students’ long-term learning pathways.

¹ The National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) list of 15 “essential elements” of a high-quality preschool program: <https://nieer.org/research-library/implementing-15-essential-elements-high-quality>

² The GEEARS Early Childhood Index is available as an online, interactive data explorer: <https://data.neighborhoodnexus.org/project/readinessradar>

³ See the GOSA website for the most recent student mobility datasets: <https://gosa.georgia.gov/dashboards-data-report-card/downloadable-data>