

## The Program

The *Get Ready for School* program is offered through the Strong Start Charitable Organization, in partnership with community organizations in Waterloo Region. It is a free, early intervention program designed to prevent at-risk preschoolers from being disadvantaged at school entry.

Children are immersed in a literacy and language-rich classroom and receive **88 hours of instruction** through a curriculum focused on **emergent literacy skills, classroom learning behaviours** and **self-regulation**. The program targets children who are learning English as a Second Language and/or come from a low socio-economic background.

The program helps to address the developmental gap that often exists between these groups and their higher income peers and helps improve lasting and long-term outcomes through its emphasis on parent education and parental involvement.



## The Participants

The expansion of the *Get Ready for School* program continued in 2019 with the addition of two new programs to the returning eighteen. Across the 19 sites and 20 program, **393 children** attended the program, with 371 children completing the entire program, resulting in a **94.4%** completion rate. Participating children were 3-4 years of age, entering Year 1 of Kindergarten in the fall.

A total of 139 of the 393 children did not speak English at home on a regular basis (ESL), and an additional 45 children spoke English, as well as a second language at home. Approximately 46 languages were spoken among participants, most predominantly Tigrinya, Spanish, Arabic, French, Mandarin and Korean.

Assessment	Pre-Test	Post-Test	Gain
Letter Sounds Knowledge (x/26),0	1.4	11.0	9.6
Phonological Awareness Task (x/30)	0.6	2.4	1.8
Receptive Vocabulary Task (percentile)	57	72	15
Learning Behaviours (x/36)	25	31	6

## The Gains

To help determine the impact and effectiveness of the program, each child was given a **pre-test** and **post-test** on a number of literacy measures (e.g., phonological awareness and vocabulary knowledge) and on one behaviour measure. Overall, the analysis of the data shows the children made statistically significant gains on all these tasks as a result of participating in the program. *A comprehensive version of this report is available upon request.*

## Phonological Awareness

Phonological awareness is one of the best predictors of children's reading ability and a foundational skill for reading success. It is the ability to focus on and manipulate the sounds in spoken language.

As an intervention program, children in the *Get Ready for School* program received explicit instruction that followed a carefully planned progression of skills. Through activities that involved identifying letter sounds, segmenting syllables, rhyming words, and blending sounds to make words, the children improved their phonological skills and identified, on average, 9 more letter sounds by the end of the program.



## Vocabulary Development

An important component of literacy development, vocabulary knowledge, is a critical prerequisite for reading comprehension and reading achievement. The children in the *Get Ready for School* program were exposed to new words and concepts linked to previous knowledge. They were provided with many opportunities to experience words in a meaningful context, through play, sorting games, storytelling, book reading, and conversations.

Vocabulary Development	Pre-Test	Post-Test	Gain
PPVT-IV Raw Score	57	72	15
PPVT-IV Age Equivalency (y:m)	3:9	4:6	0:9
PPVT-IV 1 year (12-month) Vocabulary Growth			33%
PPVT-IV 1.5 year (18-month) Vocabulary Growth			10%

The improvements the children made in their knowledge of word meanings was demonstrated by the growth of their receptive vocabulary, which was assessed using the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test, Fourth edition (PPVT-IV). The children who participated in the program showed an increase in vocabulary knowledge that went beyond what is expected during natural development over a six month period.

On average the children age equivalency score changed from 3:9(y:m) to 4:6(y:m), indicating a 9-month improvement in receptive vocabulary. An astounding 33% of children increased their vocabulary by 1 year (12 months) or more, with 10% increasing their word knowledge by 1.5 years (18 months). This accelerated rate of vocabulary acquisition is essential in bridging the gap in vocabulary knowledge. Participating children who completed both the pre- and post-tests completed the program with a vocabulary larger than 72% of same-aged peers. The increase in the children's scores at post-test and more importantly, the accelerated rate of acquisition of new word knowledge, demonstrates the effectiveness of the program in bridging any gaps that existed at start of the program.

*\*It is important to note that the averages exclude 9% of children who were unable to complete this measure at the beginning of the program but who had valid post-test scores. While this did not allow for score-to-score comparison, it demonstrated the children's significant growth in the acquisition of critical and foundational early learning skills, which allowed the children to be successful in completing this measure at the end of the program. Had these children provided valid pre-test scores, we anticipate that while the mean scores at each time-point would have been impacted, the average gains would have remained consistent.*

## Classroom Learning Behaviours and Self-Regulation

Researchers have found that intentional self-regulation predicts school success and that it is a foundation for child's long-term physical, social, psychological and behavioural well-being. The children in the *Get Ready for School* program experienced the expectations that will be set for them in the formal school system. They had many opportunities to practise classroom learning behaviours, such as raising their hands, cleaning up, transitioning between tasks, following instructions, negotiating play, and sharing.

Through effective scaffolding and by setting developmentally appropriate expectations, children in the program experienced significant improvement in their ability to self-regulate. As the program progressed and routines and structures were well established, many children were able to routinely self-regulate without the assistance of the adult. At the end of the program, children were more independent, attentive to the class routines, and engaged with the learning materials. Improvement in these social competencies helped the children feel confident, and thus shaped the attitudes and views they will have towards school and education.

## **Parent Involvement and Engagement**

Family engagement and involvement in schools is strongly associated with academic success across all socio-economic groups. It is also a focus for educational improvement in Ontario.



The *Get Ready for School* promotes and facilitates parent education and involvement. Information along with practical strategies and take-home resources are shared with families during parent meetings, 1:1 coaching sessions, and in monthly newsletters.

The parents of children attending the *Get Ready for School* program were interested and eager to be involved in their children's learning with 84% of parents attending 3 or all parent meetings. More than 95% parents participated in two 1:1 coaching sessions, receiving practical strategies to support their child on their path to reading.

The commitment of parents to the program was also demonstrated by the frequent, daily interactions with our *Get Ready for School* staff.

## **The Impact**

Our consistent program results provide evidence that the *Get Ready for School* program uses effective strategies that promote emergent literacy skills and school readiness. For the past eight years, since 2011, the program assessment results have consistently demonstrated statistically significant gains for the children, in the areas of phonemic awareness, vocabulary development and self-regulation (improved classroom learning behaviours). The *Get Ready for School* program is an effective intervention program, which promotes the acquisition of these vital skills, thereby ensuring the children's successful transition into kindergarten, and their readiness for formal reading instruction.

A multitude of letter testimonials, submitted by parents every year, have cited the importance of the program for their children. Many parents openly discussed the positive impact the program has had not only on their child but on the entire family. Ultimately, this program impacts child development, self-regulation, reading achievement and school success.

*"My daughter's English language became increasingly fluent. She knows expressions, phrases and the ability to hold a full conversation. I feel my daughter will be confident and encouraged to progress further and faster and have good social relationships in school and anywhere she goes."* – Najia Rastgar, parent

*"The program is absolutely amazing and exceeded every expectation we had. Hudson went from not knowing many letters to being able to recognize and say most of their sounds. He was always excited to read the little books he brought home. He often wanted to quiz his brothers to see if they also knew the sounds. We are no longer nervous for our November-birthday child to start Kindergarten as the program has given him the tools he needs."*  
- Laura Obal, parent

*"I was hesitant to enroll my 3-year old in this program as he was a very shy kid. We instantly saw such a difference in our boy. My son's social skills have developed. He learned to recognize letters and say the sounds. He now sings new songs, tells us about his day and even loves his healthy snacks. He has learned so much! An amazing transformation. I truly believe in this program. It certainly has helped my child prepare for Kindergarten!"*  
-Darrell Randel, parent



**Get Ready for School™**

A Strong Start to reading™ program

\*Based on the research of Dr. Luliana Baciu

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