



The Program

The *Get Ready for School* program was designed as an intervention program, to reduce the gap in literacy and school readiness skills that often exists at the time of school entry for children in low-income families and those learning English as a second language. The program is offered through the Strong Start Charitable Organization, in partnership with community organizations (e.g., community centres and libraries) in Waterloo Region.

Children receive **88 hours of instruction** through a curriculum which focuses on **emergent literacy skills** (including letter knowledge, phonological awareness and vocabulary development), and involves highly predictable classroom routines and repetitive activities and games.

The Participants

The expansion of the *Get Ready for School* program continued in 2018 with the addition of two new programs to the returning sixteen. Across the 17 sites and 18 program, **358 children** attended the program. Participating children were 3-4 years of age, entering junior kindergarten in the fall.

A total of 100 of the 358 children did not speak English at home on a regular basis (ESL), and an additional 50 children spoke English, as well as a second language at home. Approximately 45 languages were spoken among participants, most predominantly Tigrinya, Spanish, Arabic, French, Mandarin and Korean. 343 completed the program, resulting in a completion rate of 95.8%.

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 (table below shows average scores). Overall, 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.*

Assessment	Pre-test	Post-test	Gain
Letter Sounds Knowledge (x/26)	2.8	12.3	9.5
Phonological Awareness Task (x/30)	0.4	1.9	1.5
Receptive Vocabulary Task (percentile)	58	70	12
Learning Behaviours (x/36)	25	31	6

Phonological Awareness

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

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.

The children in the program increased their vocabulary skills at a faster rate than their peer counterparts, therefore decreasing any existing gaps in receptive vocabulary. On average, the children started the program with a vocabulary smaller than 42% of same-aged peers, completing the program with one larger than 63% of same-aged peers. An astounding 38% of children increased their vocabulary skills by 1 year, with 14% increasing their word knowledge by 1.5 years.

Vocabulary Development	Pre-test	Post-test	Gain
PPVT (average)	42	63	21
1. year (18-month) vocabulary Growth			38%
1.5 year (18-month) vocabulary Growth			14%

Classroom Learning Behaviours and Self-Regulation

The foundation for a child's long-term physical, psychological, behavioural and educational well-being lies in **self-regulation**. Researchers have found that intentional self-regulation predicts school success. 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 practice **classroom learning behaviours**, such as raising their hands, cleaning up, transitions 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 involvement and engagement 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* program encourages parental engagement.

The commitment of parents to the program was demonstrated by their regular attendance at the parent meetings, 82% of parents attending 3 or all 4 meetings. Parents also received regular newsletters and learning resources with suggestions on how to extend learning from class to home. During two 1:1 coaching sessions, parents were provided with practical strategies designed specifically to support their child on the path to reading.

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. A multitude of letter testimonials submitted by parents every year, cite the positive impact the program has, not only on their child, but on the entire family. Ultimately, this program impacts child development, self-regulation, reading achievement and school success.