

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 from low-income families, and those learning English as a second language. Children receive **88 hours of instruction** through a curriculum that 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

In 2014, the *Get Ready for School* program was offered in eight community sites within Waterloo Region, each returning for another year of implementation. Participating children were 3-4 years of age, and entering junior kindergarten in the fall. Across the eight sites, 150 children completed the 2014 program, which was up from the 130 children who completed the program in 2013.



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, children made significant gains on all these tasks as a result of participating in the program. *An expanded version of this report is available upon request.*

Assessment	Pre-test	Post-test	Gain
Letter Sounds (x/26)	1.4	11.0	9.5
Phonological Awareness Task (x/30)	0.2	1.6	1.4
Receptive Vocabulary Task (percentile score)	53	66	9.6
Learning Behaviours (x/36)	23	32	9.0

Phonological awareness is the ability to identify sounds in speech. It is known to be a predictor of children's reading ability. Through activities that involve identifying letter sounds, segmenting syllables, rhyming words, and blending sounds to make words, the children in the *Get Ready for School* program improved their phonological skill and were able to identify 9 more letter sounds from pre-test to the post-test.

Children in the program also improved their **vocabulary knowledge**, which is critical for reading achievement and reading comprehension. Based on results, children completed the program with a vocabulary size that was larger than 66 percent of their same-age peers. This growth is facilitated by activities that allow children to experience words in a meaningful context, such as sorting games, storytelling activities, and book reading.

Lastly, the children were introduced to classroom **learning behaviours**, such as raising their hands, following instructions, and sharing. After completing the program children were able to perform many of these actions independently. Improvement in these social competencies are important in helping the child feel confident in school, and thus shape the attitudes and views he or she will have towards school and education.

The Impact

Our consistent program results provide further evidence that the *Get Ready for School* program uses effective strategies that promote phonological awareness, vocabulary development and school-readiness skills. These critical early literacy skills help children to better prepare for the formal reading instruction they will receive in school. Ultimately, this program impacts reading achievement, and has the potential to reduce the frequency and severity of future reading problems that children may experience later in the elementary years.

