

# *Transitional Kindergarten: A Proven Strategy for Closing Opportunity Gaps*

## Background

Transitional Kindergarten (TK) is a kindergarten program for children aged 5 or about to turn 5 who do not have access to high-quality early learning experiences and have been identified as needing additional support to be successful in kindergarten. TK programs are provided at no cost to families, are staffed by certificated educators, and are fully integrated in their schools with access to meals, transportation, and recess. In January 2023, there were over 3,000 students enrolled in one of Washington's TK programs spanning 101 school districts.

In many communities, TK programs operate as part of a blended model, where students participating in TK, Head Start, and the Early Childhood Education Assistance Program (ECEAP) are all served under one roof and students are placed based on need. 80% of Washington's preschool-age children [don't have access to state-funded preschool](#), and TK is an important option available to children who qualify.

## Kindergarten Readiness

In Washington, all kindergarteners are evaluated at the beginning of the school year through the Washington Kindergarten Inventory of Developing Skills (WaKIDS) process. In this process, teachers observe their students' knowledge, skills, and abilities in six domains: Cognitive, Language, Literacy, Mathematics, Physical, and Social-Emotional.

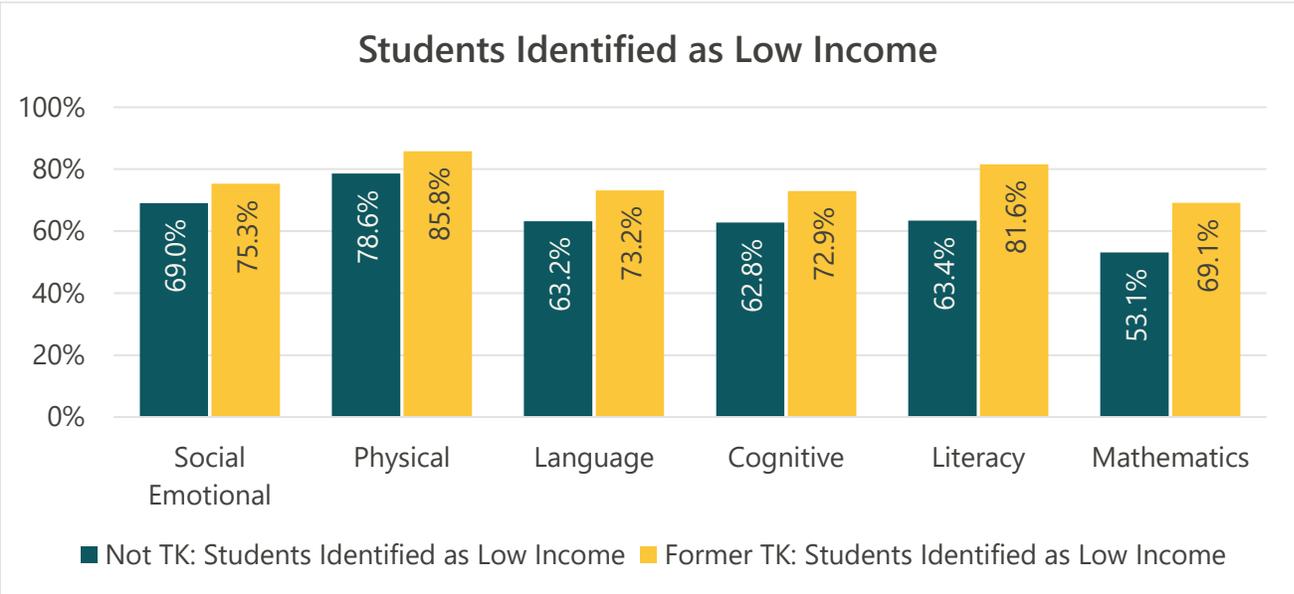
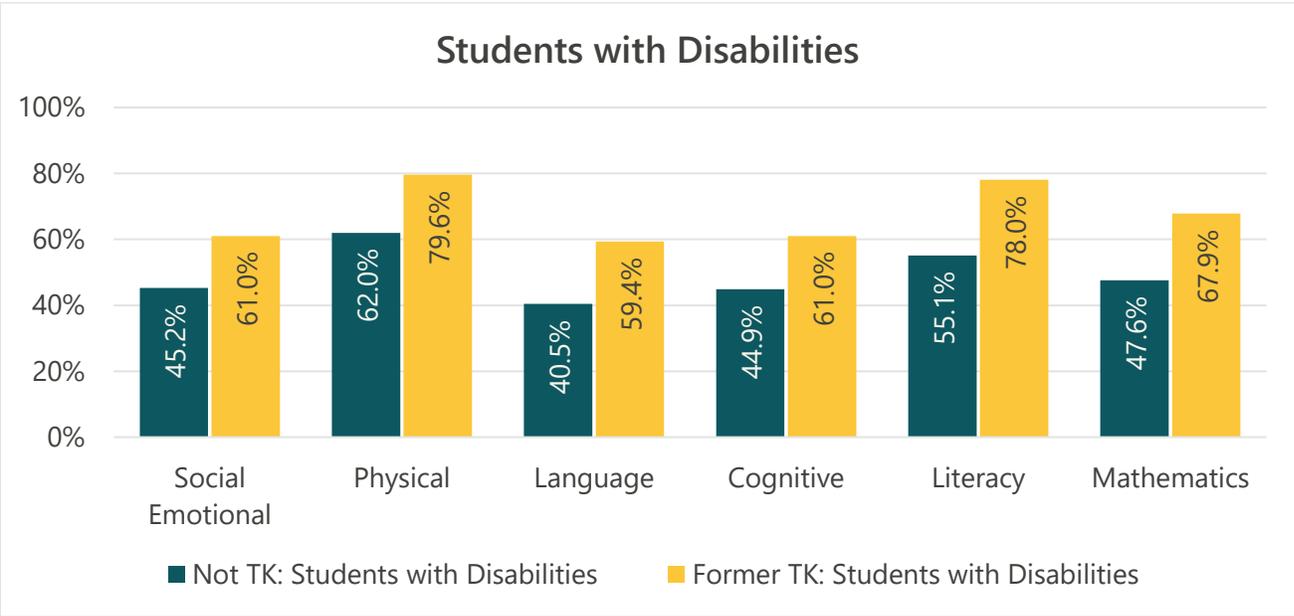
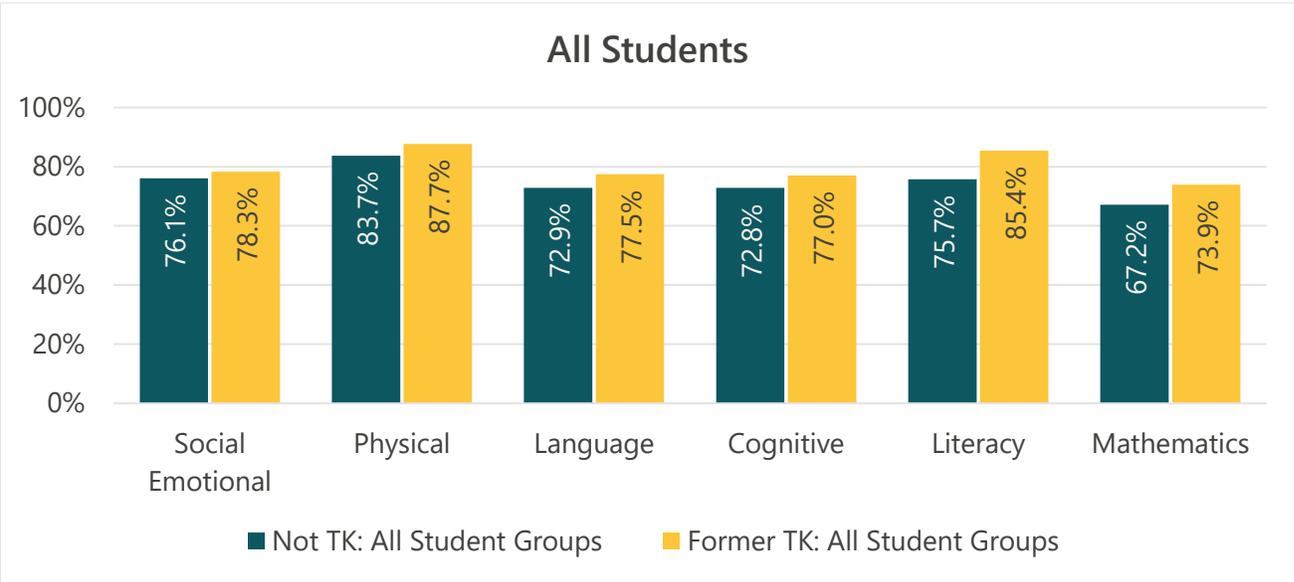
Kindergarten readiness is a strong predictor of whether students will meet standard on the third-grade statewide assessments in math and English language arts (ELA). [A recent OSPI study](#) found that students who were kindergarten-ready in Literacy and in Math were **more than 1.5 times as likely** to meet the proficiency standards on the third grade ELA and math assessments.

## Closing Opportunity Gaps Through TK

In the fall of 2022, kindergarten students who had participated in TK outperformed their peers on the WaKIDS assessment in all six domains. Differences were especially pronounced for some student groups, confirming that participation in TK—even for a short time—provides students with the jump start they need for a successful kindergarten entry.

The following data compare former TK students' readiness when they started kindergarten in fall 2022 compared to their peers who did not participate in TK. While there is a considerable difference in the n-sizes of the two groups (2,728 former TK and 76,037 not former TK), these data provide important insight into how TK closes opportunity gaps.





## Ready for Kindergarten in Number of Domains

