

Transition to Kindergarten: A Proven Strategy for Closing Opportunity Gaps

Background

Transition to Kindergarten (TK) is a legislatively established and authorized program for children who are at least 4-years-old by August 31 and have been identified through a screening process to be in need of additional preparation to be successful kindergarten students in the following school year. 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. As of January 2025, there are more than 7,600 students enrolled in one of Washington's TK programs spanning 147 school districts.

In many communities, TK programs operate as part of a mixed-delivery 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. 75% 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.

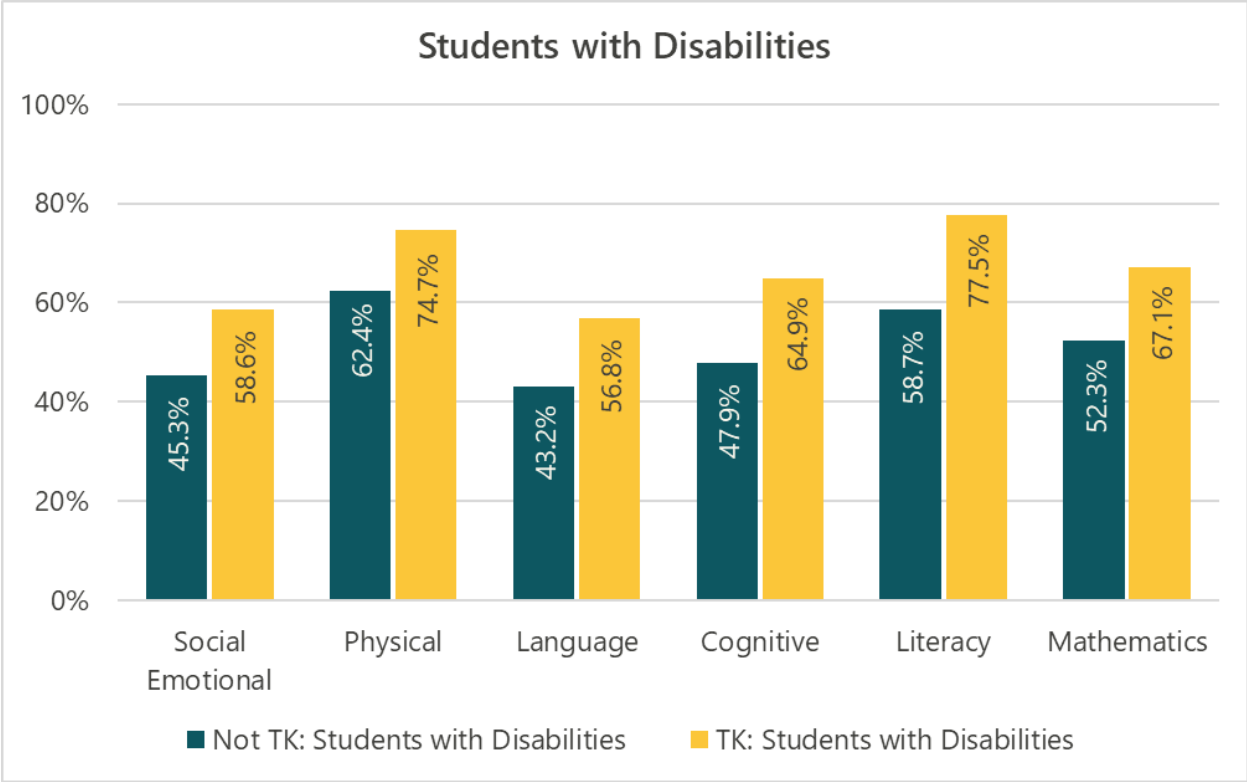
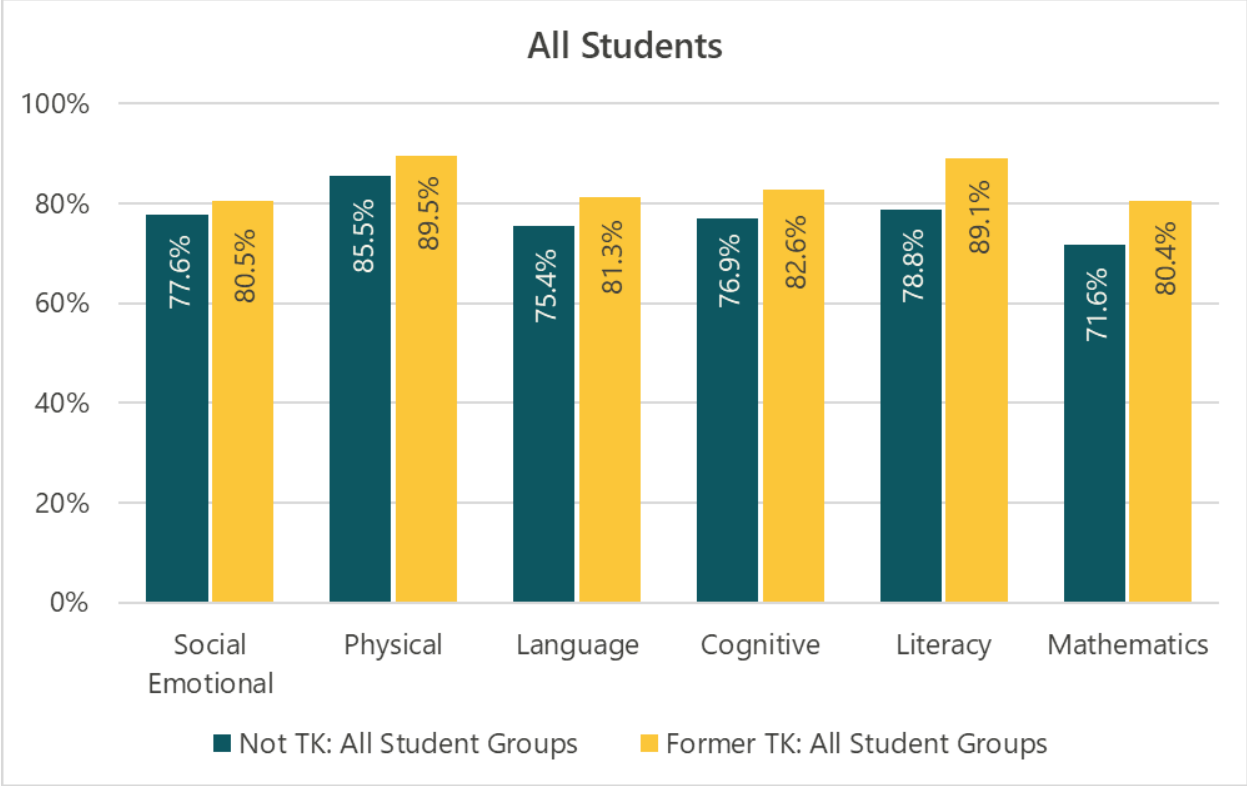
Kindergarten readiness is a strong predictor of whether students will meet standard on the third-grade statewide assessments in math and English language arts (ELA). [A 2022 OSPI study](#) found that students who were kindergarten-ready in Literacy and in Math were **more than 1.5 times as likely** to meet the proficiency standards on the third grade ELA and math assessments.

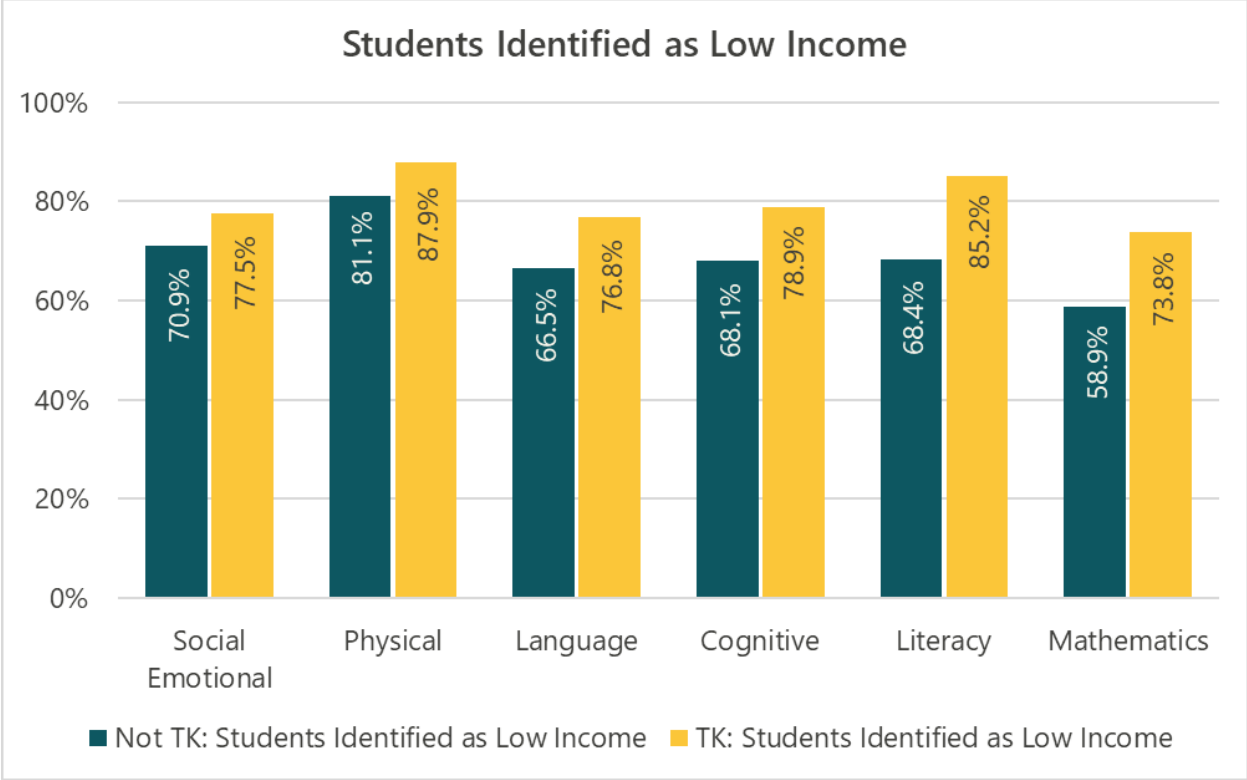
Closing Opportunity Gaps Through TK: Fall 2024 Analysis

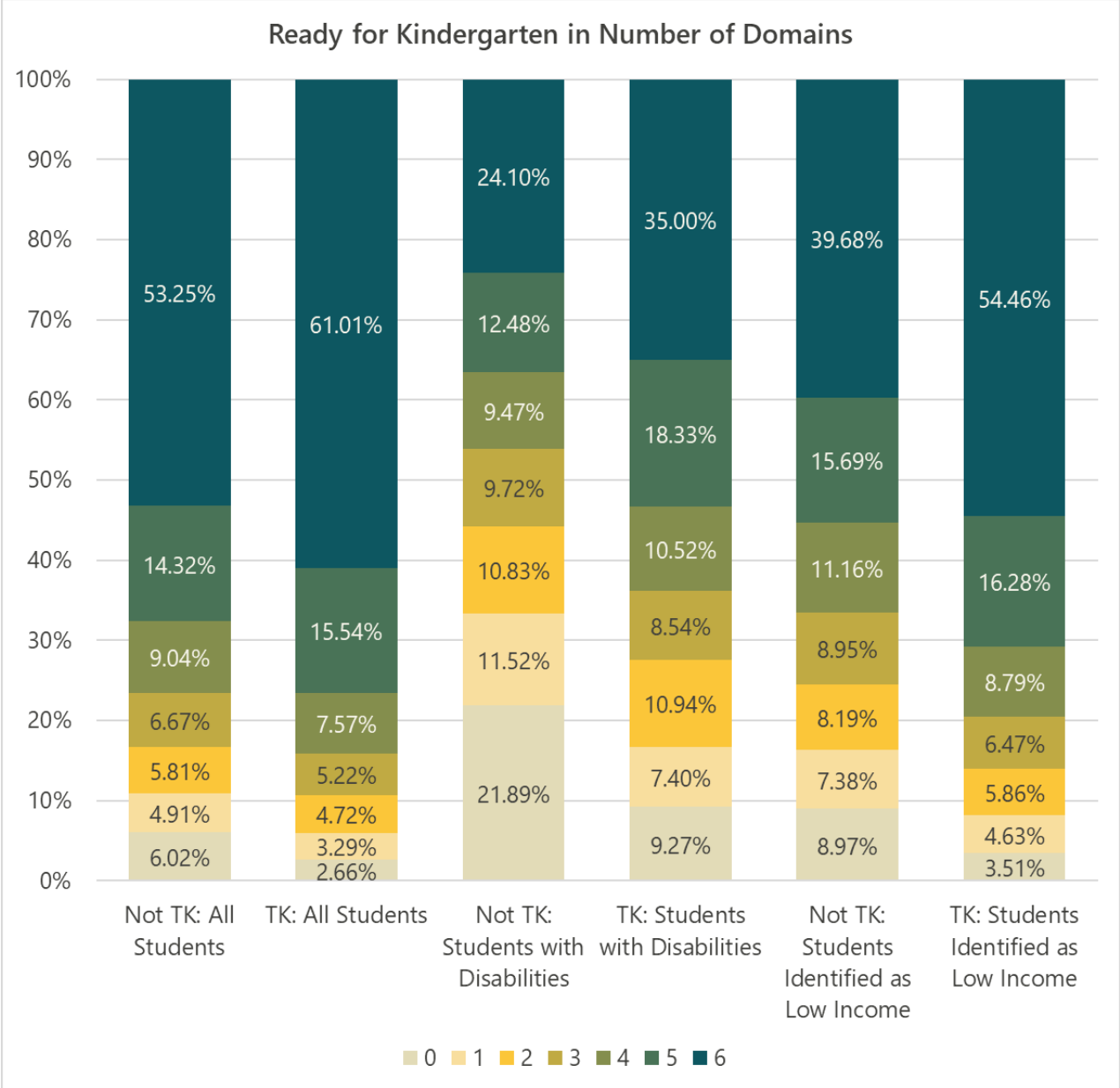
In the fall of 2024, kindergarten students who had participated in TK outperformed their peers on the WaKIDS assessment in all six domains. Differences were especially pronounced for some student groups, confirming that participation in TK—even for a short time—provides students with the jump start they need for a successful kindergarten entry.

The following data compare former TK students' readiness when they started kindergarten in fall 2024 compared to their peers who did not participate in TK. While there is a considerable difference in the n-sizes of the two groups (5,193 former TK and 64,418 not former TK), these data provide important insight into how TK closes opportunity gaps.









Continuing our Commitment to Student Success

Participation in the Transition to Kindergarten program is proving to be a significant strategy for closing opportunity gaps and ensuring all of Washington’s students are prepared for kindergarten entry. Limiting access to or removing resources from a high-quality program that is successfully serving many of our students furthest from educational justice is in direct conflict with many of the things we value most as a state.