

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, as needing additional preparation to be successful in kindergarten the following school year.

TK programs must comply with mandates outlined in the [**TK Minimum Standards and Requirements**](#), which establish best practices for site readiness, developmentally appropriate curricula, and professional development to support high-quality programming.

Despite the importance of early learning, many preschoolers continue to lack access to affordable, high-quality options. In Washington state, **only 24% of 3- and 4-year-olds are enrolled in state-funded preschool**, ranking the state **33rd nationally** for access for 4-year-olds. TK plays a critical role within Washington's mixed-delivery early learning system, alongside, and sometimes integrated with, ECEAP, Head Start, and community-based programs.

Kindergarten Readiness

In Washington, all kindergarten students are assessed at the beginning of the school year through the [**Washington Kindergarten Inventory of Developing Skills**](#) (WaKIDS). Through teacher observation, WaKIDS measures students' knowledge, skills, and abilities across six domains: Cognitive, Language, Literacy, Mathematics, Physical, and Social-Emotional.

Kindergarten readiness is a strong predictor of later academic success. [**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 statewide assessments in English Language Arts (ELA) and math assessments.

Closing Opportunity Gaps Through TK: Fall 2025 Analysis

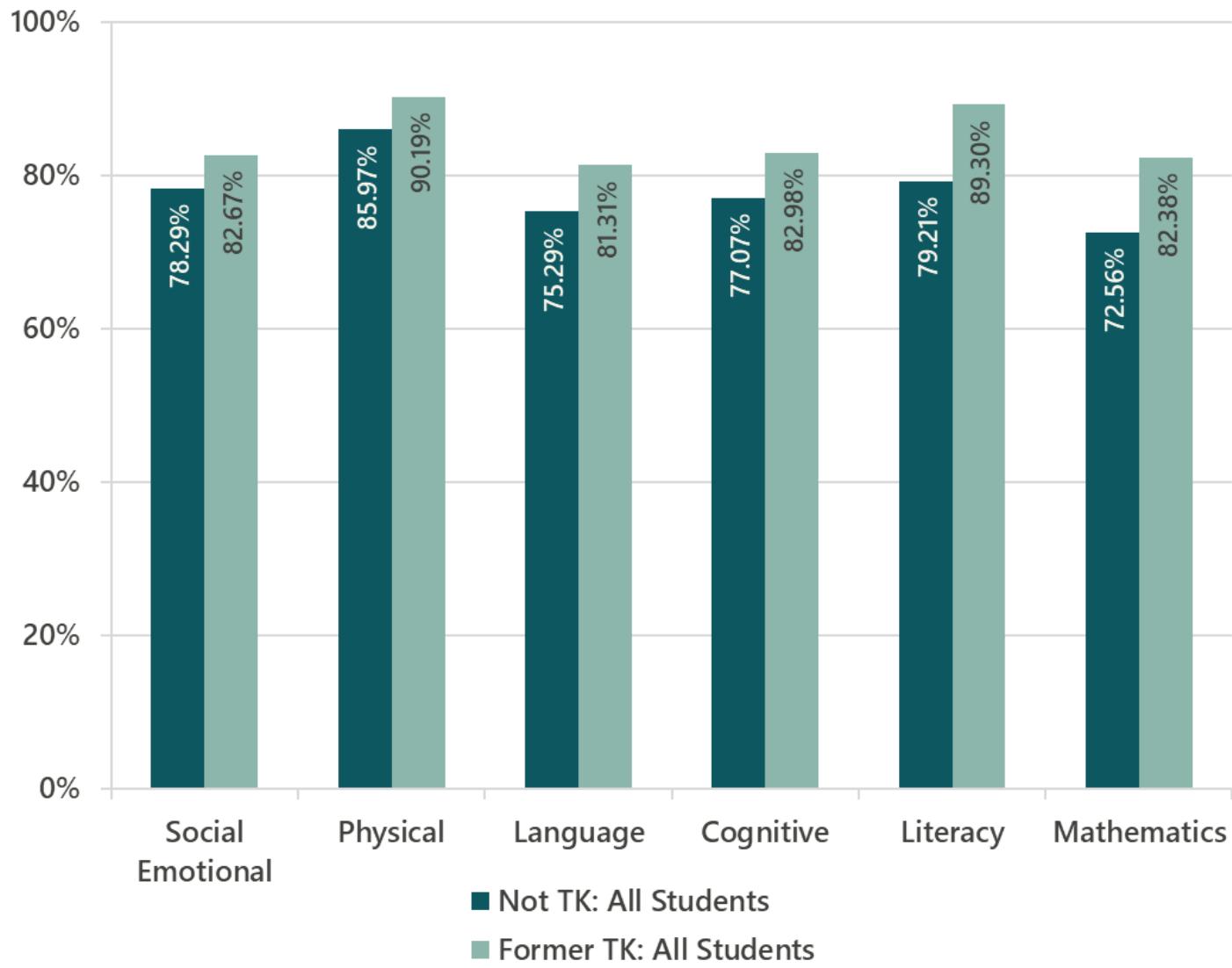
In the fall of 2025, kindergarten students who had previously participated in **TK outperformed their non-TK peers** on the WaKIDS assessment in all six domains. Differences were especially pronounced for some student groups, reinforcing that participation in TK provides students with the strong start they need for successful kindergarten entry.

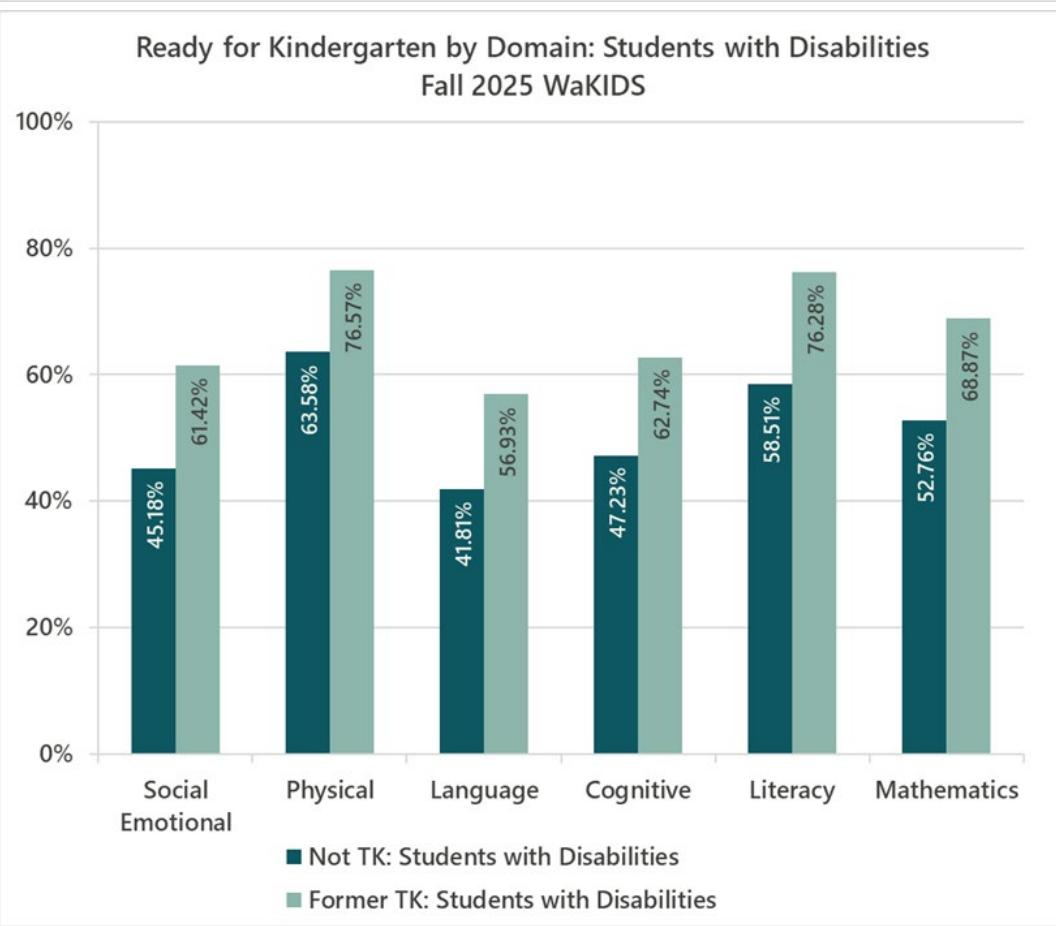
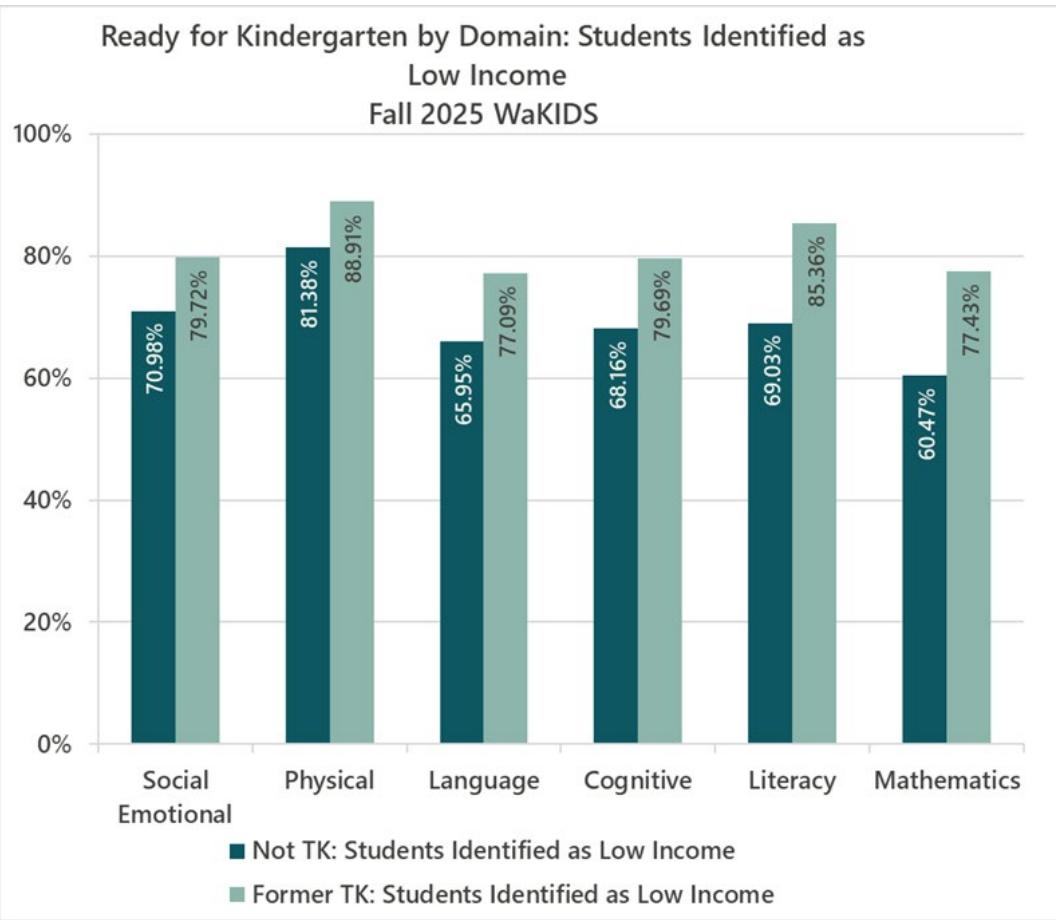
The following data compare the kindergarten readiness of former TK students with peers who did not participate in TK during the fall 2025 assessment window. While there is a notable difference in group size (5,984 former TK and 61,365 not former TK), the results offer important insight into how **TK contributes to closing opportunity gaps and supporting equitable outcomes for young learners.**



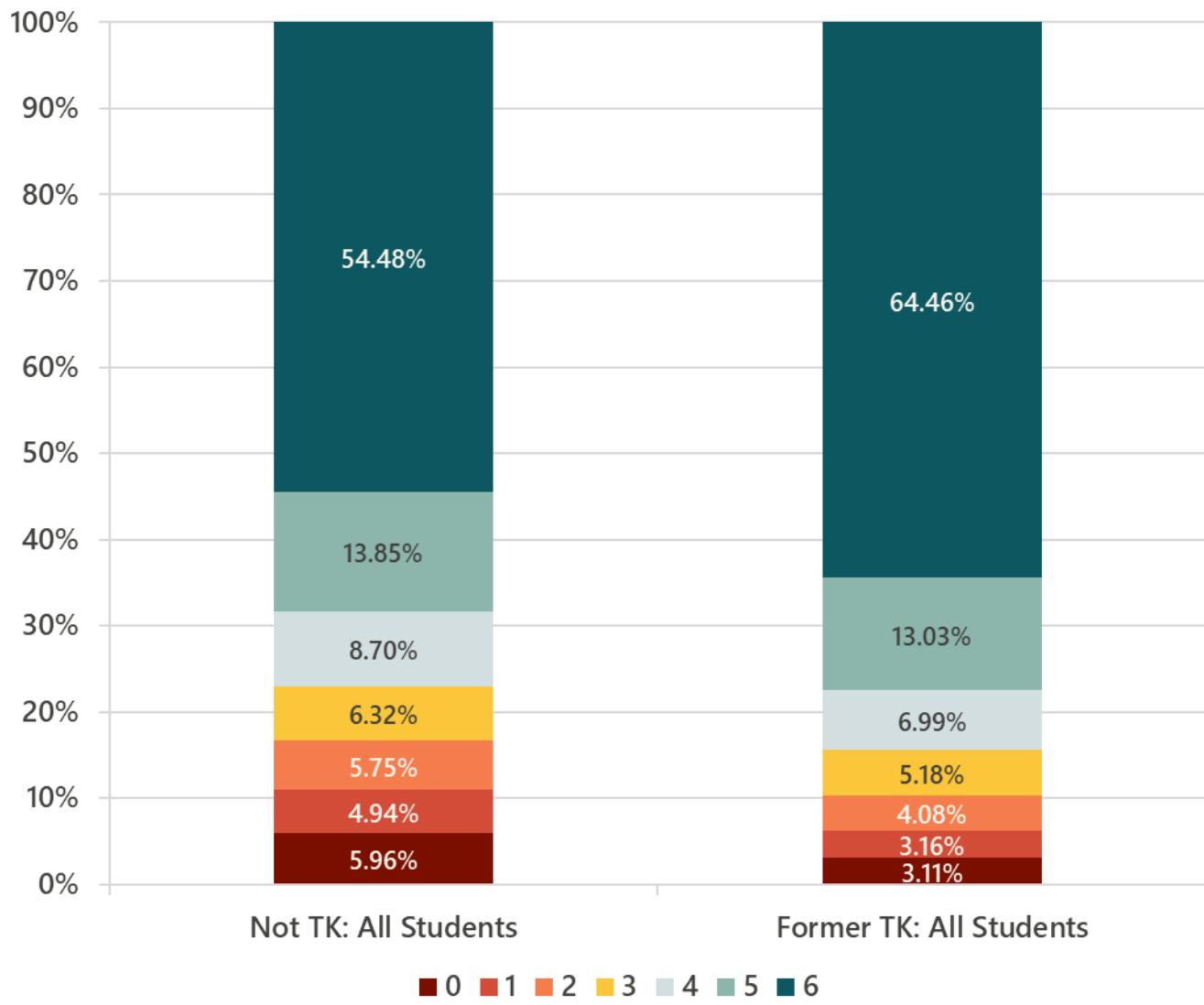
Washington Office of Superintendent of
PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

Ready for Kindergarten by Domain: All Students Fall 2025 WaKIDS





Ready for Kindergarten in Number of Domains: All Students Fall 2025 WaKIDS



Continuing our Commitment to Student Success

As the data demonstrate, participation in Transition to Kindergarten is an effective strategy for closing opportunity gaps and ensuring children across Washington enter kindergarten ready to learn. Limiting access to, or reducing investment in, a high-quality program that delivers positive outcomes for students furthest from educational justice would undermine the progress our state has made toward equity, opportunity, and early learning success.