

Ready or Not: Hawaii's Keiki Enter Kindergarten!

By Alex Harris

Does it really take a village to raise a child?

SPARK Hawaii thinks so. This well funded, multiyear effort seeks to improve the lives of vulnerable children in two communities. The strategy is twofold:

1), connecting parents, community based services, and elementary schools, and 2), changing policy at the district and state level.

SPARK Hawaii's goal is to measurably improve school readiness by leveraging community strengths and creating

system change. If successful, SPARK expects that

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children will have access to a continuum of services and stronger connections will form between early childhood programs and elementary schools.

This Issue Brief examines the impact of a targeted intervention upon two communities in Hawaii. It also serves as an example for how parents, principals and policymakers – those responsible for our *keiki* – can thoughtfully use scarce resources and measure results. Today's children will be tomorrow's adults; our test is to prepare them for the challenges ahead.



Background In 2002, Good Beginnings Alliance and the Institute for Native Pacific Education and Culture (INPEACE) embarked on a joint venture to improve school readiness. Two communities began to mobilize,

through support from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation's SPARK Initiative.

SPARK Waianae, on Oahu, consists of *moku* from Kahe Point to Makaha. Children attend elementary schools in the Waianae and Nanakuli School Complex. SPARK Hilo draws

children from areas served by Hilo and Waiakea Complexes, on the Island of Hawaii. At the same time, partners launched a complimentary effort to change early childhood policy statewide.

Elementary Schools impacted by SPARK Hawaii

SPARK Waianae	SPARK Hilo
Nanakuli Elementary	DeSilva Elementary
Waianae Elementary	Hilo Union Elementary
Kamaile Elementary	Kapiolani Elementary
Leihoku Elementary	Keaukaha Elementary
Maili Elementary	Waiakea Elementary
Makaha Elementary	Waiakeawaena Elementary
Nanaikapono Elementary	

Community Efforts

- ⇒ Parent participation preschools, called Keiki Steps, are sponsored by INPEACE and hosted by elementary schools on or near their campuses in Keaukaha and Panaewa Hawaiian Homes Community Associations three times a week.
- ⇒ A SPARK summer transition program, called Keiki Steps to Kindergarten, is offered by most elementary schools for students that lack preschool experience.
- ⇒ INPEACE connects children to a range of health and education services within the community.

State Policy Initiatives

- ⇒ Preschool Content Standards and Family/Community Guidelines were developed by Hawaii's School Readiness Task Force to clarify expectations for parents, providers and schools.
- ⇒ Transition protocols help strengthen the connection between preschools, community programs and elementary schools.
- ⇒ The Hawaii State School Readiness Assessment, or HSSRA, was created to provide data on school readiness.
- ⇒ 2005 state pre-k funding increased from \$3.3M to \$8.3M.
- ⇒ Department of Human Services' Quality Care Program initiated in 2006 to recognize and reward quality in preschools and childcare centers.

How can the Hawaii State School Readiness Assessment be used ?



HSSRA data is used to examine the influence of SPARK Hawaii. Two aspects are measured: a child's readiness for school and a school's readiness for entering children. Both matter immensely in the quest to improve today's schools. While two years of data are not enough to determine impact, certain trends do become apparent.

Author's Note: The HSSRA is administered within the first month of kindergarten. Unlike other assessments, it does not reflect the performance of an individual child, but rather the class as a whole.

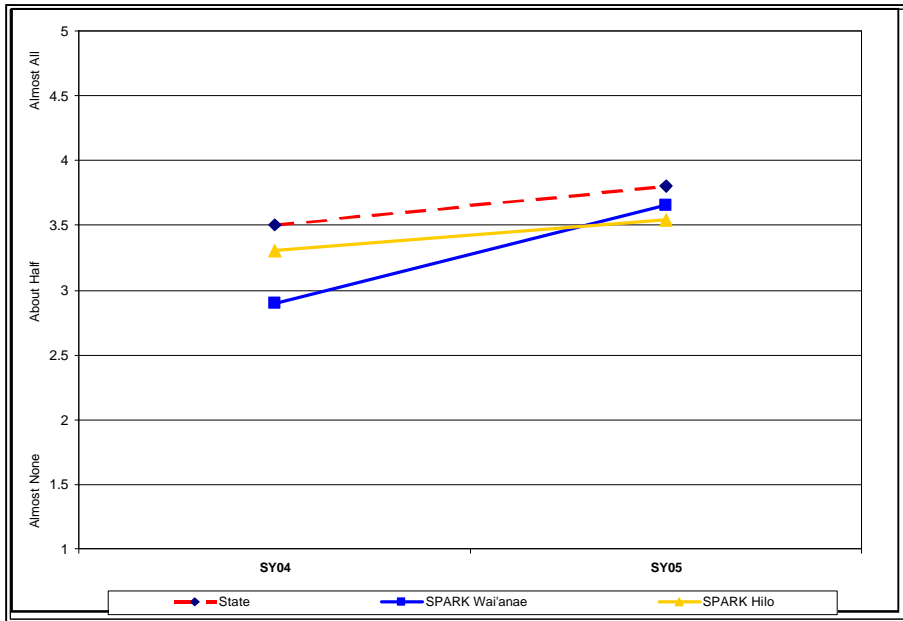
The tool uses two scales: the first measures the percent of the entering class that is well prepared for school on a **five** point scale, while the second measures whether school practices are well established in support of entering children, using a **three** point scale.

"Well-prepared": refers to children that display academic skills, social behaviors and physical well being.

"Well-established": refers to school policies and procedures that are concrete and in place.

How many children are well-prepared when they enter elementary schools in SPARK Waianae and SPARK Hilo neighborhoods?

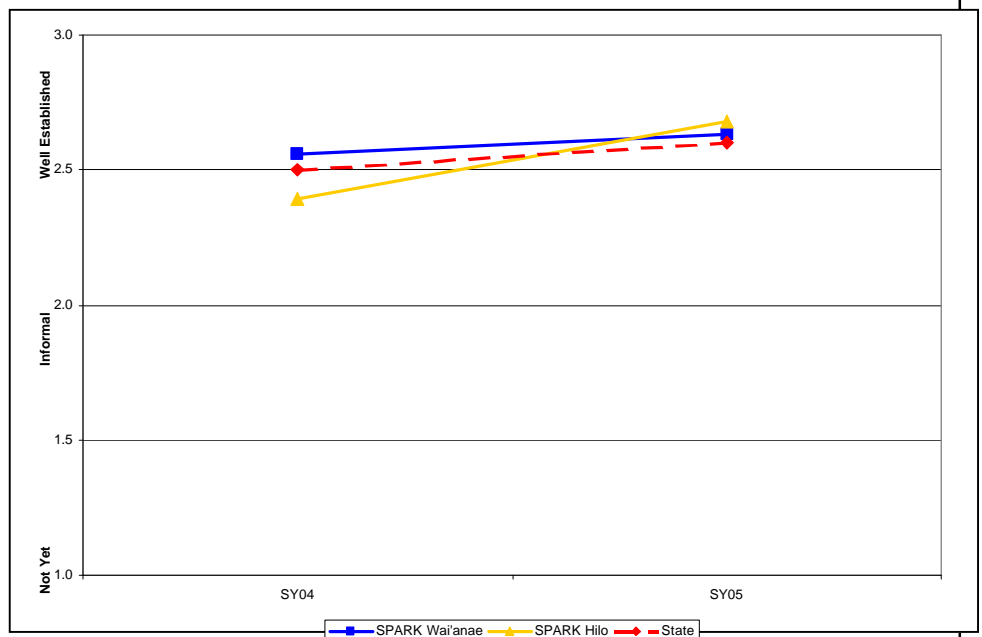
Thanks in part to Hawaii's emerging focus on schools readiness, the number of children well prepared for kindergarten has grown. In fact, by 2005, almost three-quarters of children entered school with the attitudes and skills needed for classroom success.



The two SPARK Hawaii communities offer optimistic news as well: children entering SPARK Hilo elementary schools mirrored the statewide improvement, while those entering SPARK Waianae schools showed an even steeper improvement. Both communities, however, remain slightly below the state average in 2005 .

How about the schools themselves – how many are prepared for entering children?

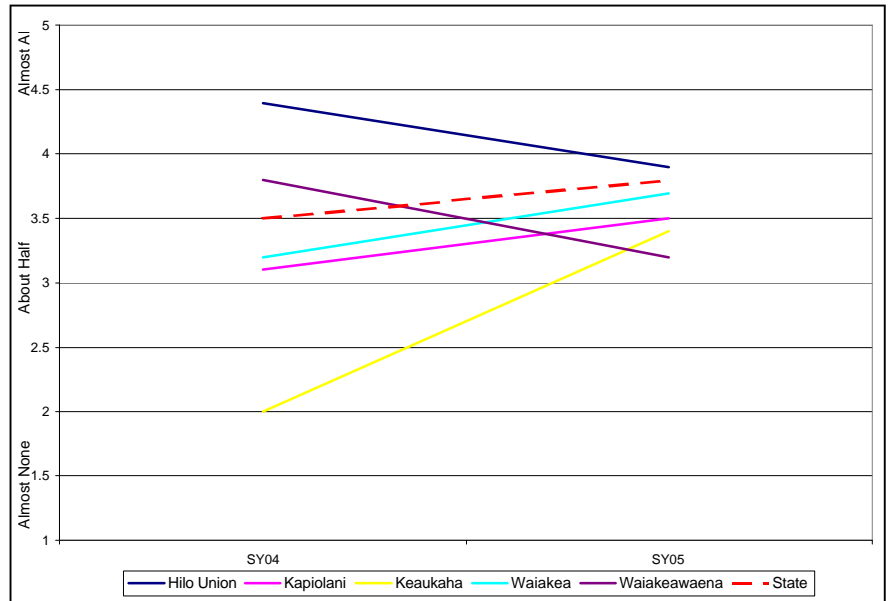
Again, on average, elementary schools throughout the state showed a slight improvement in their early childhood practices. SPARK Waianae schools mirrored the state average by showing minor improvement. The dramatic results, however, occurred in SPARK Hilo schools, which showed impressive gains in establishing early childhood practices.



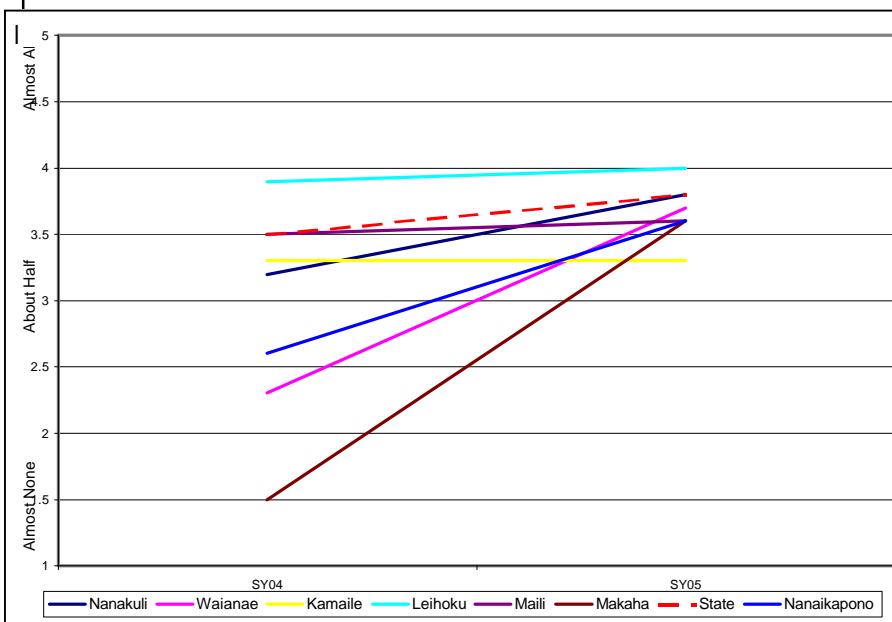
For HSSRA data on all Hawaii elementary schools, please visit <http://arch.k12.hi.us/school/hssra/default.html>

Are there important trends at the school level?

The percentage of well prepared children increased in most elementary schools. This was not always the case, however. Children entering Hilo Union and Waiakeawaena Elementary were less well prepared in 2005 than the year before. Notably, these two schools were ones which received few SPARK resources.



Note: DeSilva Elementary did not provide child readiness data in '04 or '05

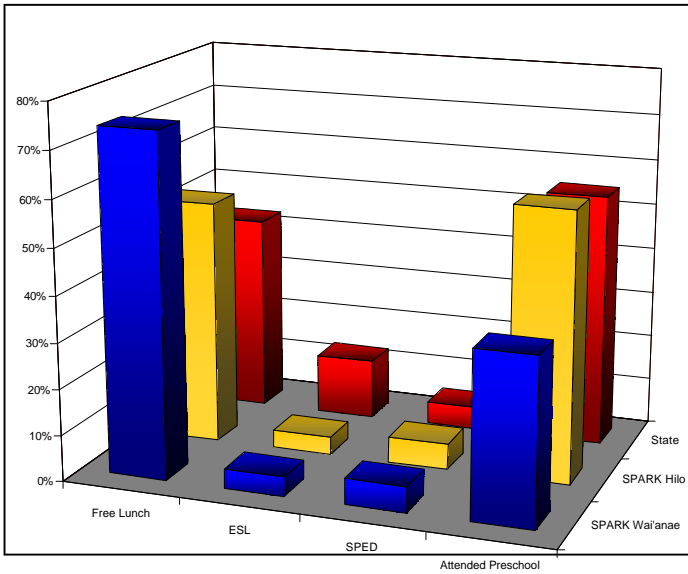


Communities with a significant SPARK presence, such as Makaha, Waianae and Keaukaha Elementary schools, showed particularly impressive growth in school readiness. Although lacking a causal connection, these data offer strong evidence of SPARK's impact.

Do demographic factors explain child readiness?

Research shows that child poverty (free/reduced lunch), English as a Second Language (ESL), preschool attendance and special needs (SpEd) all affect school readiness. The chart on the following page shows the extent of such demographic factors upon SPARK Waianae, SPARK Hilo and the entire state.

Schools served by SPARK Waianae and SPARK Hilo clearly contain a greater proportion of poor children than the state as a whole. At the same time, children from both communities face fewer challenging ESL issues. While children at schools served by SPARK Hilo benefited from preschool at roughly the statewide average, far fewer children are in preschools along the Waianae Coast.



Note: DeSilva Elementary did not provide demographic data in '05

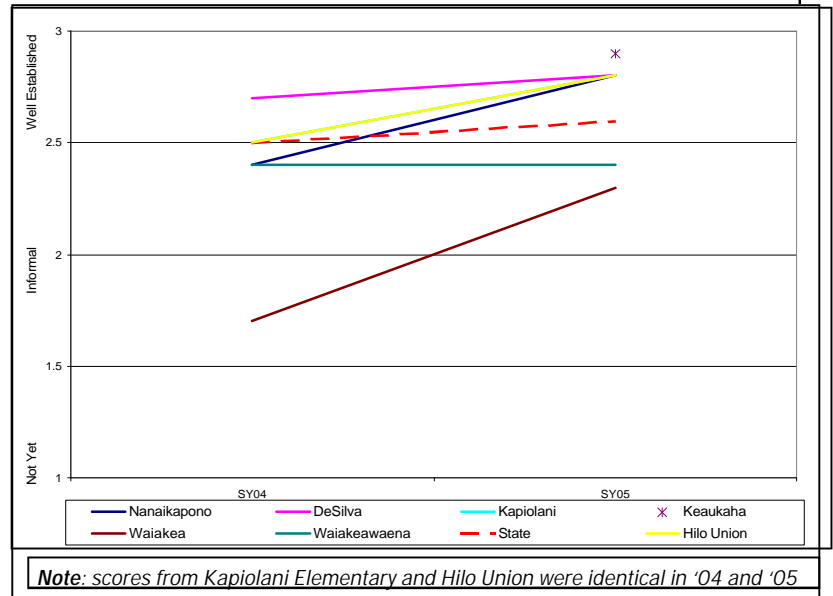
Without regression analysis, it is impossible to determine how much these factors impact readiness. However, the data describe the unique set of challenges faced by elementary schools that SPARK Hawaii serves.

So, what are elementary schools doing to prepare for entering keiki?

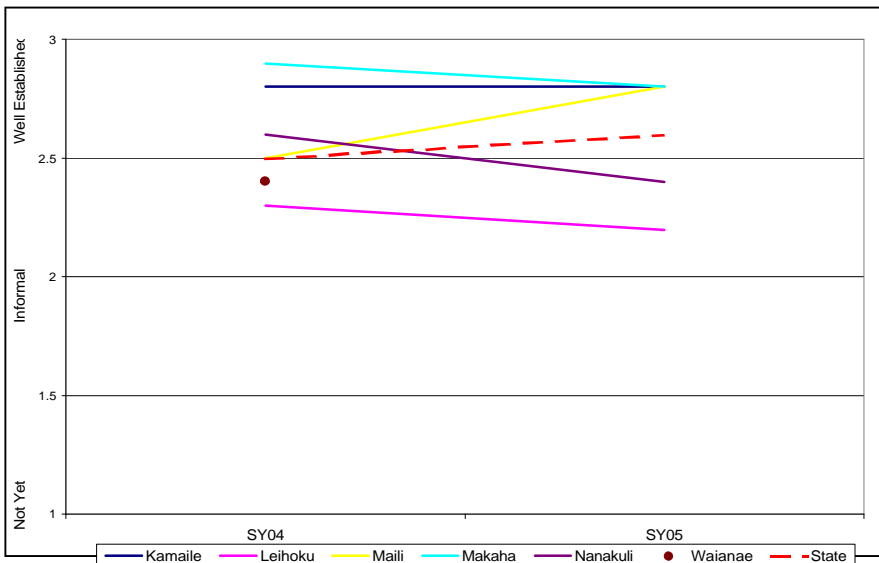
Preparing children for kindergarten is more complex than simply asking parents to register early. Elementary schools have a responsibility to implement early childhood practices that support

the transition of entering students. These may include sponsorship of a summer transition program for children lacking preschool, developing curriculum that meets the needs of the children, or training teachers in the nuances of child development. This focus of SPARK Hawaii is reflected in the data.

These two charts should encourage as well as concern. Most SPARK Hawaii schools have moved to adopt important early childhood practices that foster a better learning environment. In fact, seven of the twelve schools exceed the state average.



Note: scores from Kapiolani Elementary and Hilo Union were identical in '04 and '05



Waiakeawaena shows no improvement, however, while Nanakuli and Leihoku actually exhibit a disturbing backslide. This report indicates a need to promptly review early learning practices and consider modifications. No matter how well prepared the entering children are, the environment of a school is a crucial aspect of school readiness.

Note: Keaukaha Elementary did not complete this portion of the HSSRA in '04, while Wai'anae Elementary did not complete in '05.

Conclusion

While conclusions are limited by two years of data, the HSSRA is a useful tool to identify promising improvements and address concerns.

The HSSRA data paint a positive trend. Despite challenges posed by complicated demographics, far more children entered SPARK elementary schools well prepared in 2005 than the previous year. These achievements should be celebrated by parents, principals, and policymakers alike.

At the same time, many elementary schools deliberately improved their early childhood practices, contributing to the school's overall environment. Cautions and warning signs remain, however. Certain schools and communities deserve careful monitoring and may require intensive interventions.



How can this information be used to help children?

You do not need to be an expert in data to use the HSSRA. The following illustrates how principals, parents and policymakers can all benefit from this activity.

Principals: The transition of children into kindergarten is one area where your school can make large gains with a relative modest effort. Use the HSSRA to evaluate the policies and practices of your school. Explore school readiness interventions such as training in child development, outreach to entering students, sponsor parent participation preschools or a summer transition program. Evaluate the strengths and deficits of entering children, align instructional curriculum, target early reading initiatives and use Junior Kindergarten classes to meet student needs.

Parents: You can use the HSSRA to engage principals, teachers, parents and other interested community members in a dialogue. Ask about what schools are doing to welcome entering kindergarteners. Help form partnerships between child serving organizations and your local elementary school. And, talk publicly about progress from year to year – your voice matters!

Policymakers: Early childhood funds are drawn from a range of sources and departments. Policymakers can use the HSSRA information to target these scarce resources to shore up deficits and optimize returns. You should also use the data for accountability purposes; as Hawaii's investment in young children grows, so too, should the demands for an increase in school readiness.

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