



## First 5 Commission of San Diego County – PoP Program Profile

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### County Background

In 2003, San Diego County proposed the Preschool for All (SDCPFA) Program allowing for universal access to quality early education experiences for all three- and four-year old children regardless of income, fully preparing San Diego County's four-year old children for a successful transition to kindergarten. The First 5 Commission of San Diego County proposed a five-year demonstration project in fiscal year 2005-06 to open quality preschool classrooms in six demonstration areas of San Diego County by fall of 2006. In fiscal year 2006-07, PoP services were provided in National City. Beginning in fiscal year 2007-08, PoP services were expanded to five additional communities: Lemon Grove, San Ysidro, South Bay, Escondido, and Valley Center/Pauma. Two additional areas will be added in fall 2008, which include Mt. Empire and Vista. All areas serve four-year-olds, with the exception of National City, which is funded to provide services to all three- and four-year olds. The areas were targeted based on elementary schools' API scores and population demographics such as English Language Learners and family income. The First 5 Commission of San Diego County administers the program through the San Diego County Office of Education (SDCOE).

The focus for the San Diego project is expanding access to preschool and improving the quality of preschool programs. To ensure quality, staff established an external review process with tiered funding associated with review scores. Highly qualified and experienced early childhood education experts conducted the comprehensive external review process. SDPFA invested a minimum of 15 hours of consultant and staff time for each preschool session's external review. Each preschool session results documents contain both numeric line item scores and detailed anecdotal observation notes. Review results significantly impacted quality improvement in classrooms and preschool sites. The individual session results continue to impact the instructional team in each preschool classroom throughout the year following the review. Early Childhood Professional Development Training Assistants provide coaching support for all participating preschool sessions (family child care homes and center-based), to assist providers in raising quality based on their external review results. In order to support preschool instructional staff to continue their early

childhood education, coaches also assist them in navigating the higher education system.

### **Children Served**

As of March 2008, San Diego County served more than 2,000 three- and four-year olds. Of these children, more than 1,000 were English Language Learners and 145 were children with special needs. SDCOE operated 129 sessions for 3-3.5 hours per day with 69 morning sessions, 48 afternoon sessions and 12 full-day sessions. All sessions operated on an academic year. Many of these sessions were held in unused K-12 buildings and public and private facilities.

Providers used an array of curricula, including Reggio Emilia, Creative Curriculum Developmentally Appropriate Practices, Houghton Mifflin PRE-K Alphafriends, High Scope, Montessori, and self-designed curriculum. A total of 127 teachers participated. Thirty-six percent of teachers were at quality level, 54 percent at advancing level, and 10 percent at entry level. A total of 112 assistant teachers participated, 75 percent of whom were at quality level, 21 percent at advancing level, and four percent at entry level.

### **Partners**

San Diego County partners with Child Development Associates (CDA) as the reimbursement agency, YMCA Child Resource Services (CRS) as the North County Regional HUB Operator, and San Diego State University's Foundation to provide training and technical assistance on parent engagement activities. The partners utilize the six types of parent engagement work done by Joyce Epstein. Parents utilizing the Epstein model for parent engagement, an area of emphasis for the demonstration project, founded the San Diego PFA Master Plan.

### **Local Evaluation**

First 5 Commission of San Diego County staff is responsible for the evaluation of all First 5 initiatives and projects, including the SDCPFA/PoP Demonstration Project. First 5 staff develops and monitors all elements of the SDCPFA/PoP Scope of Work as contracted through the San Diego County Office of Education; defining the scope of the evaluation, and ensuring that the demonstration project adheres to the commission's Strategic Plan, Evaluation Framework and the overall direction of the commission, as well as the statewide SDCPFA/PoP evaluation guidelines.

The First 5 Commission of San Diego County employs an evaluation contractor that is responsible for developing and implementing the commission's countywide Annual Evaluation and ensures that all evaluation

efforts are synchronized with the commission's Strategic Plan and the Evaluation Framework across all funded initiatives and projects. The evaluation contractor suggests the establishment of specific outcome indicators to ensure that the SDCPFA/PoP evaluation design incorporates all necessary elements from the statewide SDCPFA/PoP evaluation design, as well as other local evaluation efforts. The evaluation contractor conducts primary data collection regarding overall aspects of the evaluation, works with SDCOE to establish primary data collection protocols from SDCPFA/PoP subcontractors/providers, analyzes individual and site level data for trend analysis and provides technical assistance to SDCOE and subcontractor/providers as needed.

SDCOE has developed a data collection system for the demonstration project. SDCOE also works with the commission's evaluation contractor to facilitate the implementation of appropriate data collection protocols for PFA/PoP subcontractors/providers, provides technical assistance to the PFA providers and subcontractors as needed, and reviews data for contract monitoring and program improvement efforts.

SDCPFA/PoP subcontractors/providers are responsible for collecting, inputting and submitting data for the SDCPFA Demonstration Project evaluation as described in the SDCPFA Operating Guidelines. They participate in quarterly meetings of the Provider Evaluation Committee to surface challenges to implementing the evaluation, provide input as to the feasibility of data collection requirements, and make recommendations for system improvements.

## **Innovations**

### **Preschool Instructional Staff and Site Supervisors Received PFA Stipends**

Eligible preschool teachers, instructional assistants and site supervisors received stipends from SDCPFA in June amounting to approximately \$300,000 in FY2007/2008. Stipend eligibility is based on the highest level of education and quality score on the ECERS/FCCERS for classroom staff and the Program Administrator's Scale (PAS) for site supervisors. Staff find the stipends an extremely motivating factor to reach for quality and continue their education.

### SDCPFA creates Comprehensive Data System

The San Diego County PoP Project is dedicated to contributing a comprehensive data management system to measure program effectiveness according to the project guidelines. This system's flexibility allows it to interface with a variety of preexisting systems and/or future systems, serving PoP partners. Three primary functions make this data management system exceptional: 1) the database stores every bit of information gathered into a single virtual warehouse; 2) the database provides project management with evidence available to help inform decisions; and 3) the database easily produces reports necessary to substantiate San Diego's efforts toward increasing the level of quality preschool experiences available to young children.

### Local Funding

The PoP program requires significant contributions from local First 5 county commissions and partners for support. This funding along with the First 5 California contribution enhances state, federal and/or private funds to fully finance local county PoP programs. At the end of fiscal year 2006-07, the First 5 Commission of San Diego County reported cumulative expenditures of \$1.3 million from the First 5 Commission of San Diego County and \$1.7 million from State Title 5 programs. These expenditures cover the first two fiscal years of program operations. This funding does not include any in-kind contributions from either the First 5 Commission of San Diego County or its partners.



## **County and State PoP Lessons Learned**

## County and State PoP Lessons Learned

The Power of Preschool (PoP) programs are by design demonstration programs. Consequently, each county developed its program model based upon the required quality criteria, but defined their own methods and strategies of implementation. These programs are evolving based on experiences, challenges encountered and successes achieved. Through this process, both First 5 California and the nine county partners are learning significant lessons during both the planning and implementation stages. The lessons learned will be important considerations for policy development and preschool program implementation on a statewide basis.

### County Lessons Learned

At this midway point of PoP program implementation eight counties shared their lessons learned, which are listed below:

- **First 5 LA**
  - ❖ Improving qualifications of the preschool workforce will not necessarily result in increased compensation.
  - ❖ Facility development process takes much longer than originally anticipated. Common delays involve contracting and due diligence, receiving/approving architectural proposals, construction delays, etc.
- **First 5 Commission of San Diego County**
  - ❖ External reviews of preschool sites are more time consuming and more difficult to manage than originally thought.
  - ❖ Recruiting well qualified, bilingual reviewers has been challenging.
  - ❖ Family child care home involvement has been very easy. Family child care home providers are savvy and adapt to change quickly. Use of FCC home providers may be slightly more expensive to embrace.
- **First 5 San Francisco**
  - ❖ Outreach to providers is very important and ongoing communications with stakeholders essential.
  - ❖ Participating sites must be involved and informed to help shape program policies.
  - ❖ Paperwork burden, perceived or real, impacts perspectives of potential and participating sites.
  - ❖ Process evaluation is critical to track the progress of implementation during startup.

- ❖ Investments in infrastructure for the system are important, but balance is critical.
- **First 5 San Joaquin**
  - ❖ The reimbursement method needs to allow for consistent reimbursement and budgetary flexibility for preschool service delivery.
  - ❖ Reimbursement needs to be made timely to providers/sites.
  - ❖ The option of local providers submitting one preschool budget for all spaces (regardless of site or quality level) allows more budgetary flexibility for preschool delivery, provides a separation of fiscal review and quality issues, and reduces paperwork and staff time reporting.
  - ❖ A policy pertaining to the use of long-term substitutes must be developed that maintains the classroom quality level over a long period of time.
- **First 5 San Mateo County**
  - ❖ In order to promote a higher BA completion rate among teachers, and a workforce that has the expertise to create optimal, nurturing learning environments for young children, a more coordinated approach is needed. This approach would involve a partnership between institutions of higher education, funders, early childhood programs and other professional development and mentoring services that research shows have an impact on teacher skills.
  - ❖ Early childhood mental health consultation services have helped some classrooms to better meet the needs of children with special needs, especially those with behavioral concerns, but the need still far outpaces available resources. Moreover, the majority of programs said there is a need for enhanced collaboration between PFA and school district special education staff. Training is needed, specifically on the Ages and Stages Questionnaire.
  - ❖ Resources are not sufficient at the local level to develop and implement evaluations that are truly capable of measuring impact in all the major areas addressed by PoP.
- **FIRST 5 Santa Clara County**
  - ❖ Successfully bringing together organizations across diverse sectors (state- and federally-funded, local non-profit, small business, family child care home) demands thoughtful investments of time, funding, facilitation and other support resources.
  - ❖ Individualized support for quality enhancement at the organizational, site, and teacher level is essential. A Quality Enhancement Support Team (QuEST) that Santa Clara County

established is composed of experts in various domains of early education. These experts work in partnership with preschool administrators and teachers to develop a Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) for each PoP session, based on teacher and administrator self assessments and observations by the QuEST member.

- **First 5 Ventura County**
  - ❖ The business community was under-represented in the PfA planning process.
  - ❖ A sustained public funding source needs to be obtained. In lieu of that, counties need to carefully determine degree of ramp-up when funding is temporary.
- **First 5 Yolo**
  - ❖ The importance of planning prior to program implementation is critical to successful implementation.
  - ❖ Private funding for PoP has been difficult to obtain. Representatives of private sources convey that preschool should be government-funded as opposed to privately funded.

## State Lessons Learned

In reflecting on the development and implementation of the PoP Demonstration Program, First 5 California has identified the following important lessons learned:

- **Program**
  - ❖ To ensure quality preschool environment ratings, there needs to be more trained external reviewers (Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Revised and Family Child Care Environment Rating Scale-Revised) across the state.
  - ❖ Evaluation design must be well-developed and incorporated into the Request for Application with the intent of immediate implementation once the application is approved. Evaluation questions should be clear, concise, realistic, and measurable.
  - ❖ Institutions of higher education need to be a primary partner in building the foundation for workforce development.
- **Funding**
  - ❖ A sustainable funding source needs to be secured.
  - ❖ First 5 California reimbursement rates are less than ideal. Rates need to be realistic to encourage local county and site participation.
  - ❖ Invoice methodology should be based on the teacher quality level for a classroom of children rather than a per space

reimbursement to be consistent with the reimbursement structure.

- **State Administration**

- ❖ Program database is needed to collect and compile county and state information.
- ❖ Effective communication channels between state and county programs need to be established to ensure program effectiveness.
- ❖ More resources at the state level need to be identified to provide meaningful technical assistance to county commissions.



## Conclusions and Next Steps

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### Significant Lessons Learned

In preparing this report, we discovered that counties experienced and identified significant lessons learned that cover a spectrum of challenges and successes. The lessons' breadth and scope lend themselves to both program improvement and policy considerations when presenting recommendations to the legislature and policymakers.

### Conclusions

#### 1. Dedicated County Staff

There is a very strong commitment on the part of the county PoP staff to implement high-quality programs in their counties. County PoP staff face many challenges at the local level, both in the planning and implementation stages. County staff work diligently through these challenges to provide quality services to preschool children and their families. The nine First 5 county commissions should be applauded for their willingness to make PoP a priority program within their counties.

#### 2. High Teacher Quality

A majority of the PoP teaching staff are at the advanced or quality education levels. Previously, program developers assumed that the majority would start at the entry level and that it would take the full five years for teachers to reach the higher degree requirements.

#### 3. Reimbursement Linked to Teacher Quality

The link between teacher qualifications and the reimbursement structure is important. However, we still need to study how to maximize this connection. It appears that a pattern is emerging that bases reimbursement rates by classroom depending on the teacher education level rather than by individual spaces filled by children.

#### 4. Partnerships

Recruiting and retaining partners is essential to program success. The counties reported the use of numerous partners assisting them in program delivery. Partnerships vary from local businesses to institutions of higher education to local social service agencies; each is important to the success of meeting children and family needs.

#### 5. Collaboration with Institutions of Higher Education

The counties actively engaged with local colleges and universities show multiple strategies that strengthen the workforce within their counties. The flexibility of institutions of higher education working with

the PoP programs to increase and develop classes for professional development clearly assists PoP teaching staff to achieve higher degrees related to the field of early childhood education.

## **6. Serving Children in Highest Need Areas**

By design, the PoP Demonstration Program required services to begin in areas of high need, as defined by low performing schools with Academic Performance Index scores of one through five. This requirement has been validated by a key finding in the recently released RAND study, *Prepared to Learn: The Nature and Quality of Early Care and Education of Preschool-Age Children in California*. The study finds that children who could benefit most from preschool are least likely to participate. RAND identifies these children, who fall into the following groups: 1) Latinos and African Americans; 2) those with low parental education; 3) English Language Learners; and 4) those from economically disadvantaged families (as defined by the California Department of Education). Specifically, the RAND finding indicates that “Participation in ECE is not uniform, with lower rates for children in disadvantaged socioeconomic groups.”<sup>10</sup> This finding reflects the importance of PoP in continuing to give priority service to children in the highest need areas.

## **Next Steps**

During the remainder of the program, several next steps need attention:

1. Define program recommendations for statewide policy development.
2. Further study of the reimbursement structure process to determine which method to use in reimbursing local programs.
3. Capitalize on the child outcome data of PoP counties’ evaluation efforts.
4. Explore how to use these nine demonstration programs as models to replicate throughout the state.
5. Investigate strategies to secure partnerships that effectively support and enhance preschool program quality. This investigation should also consider how to more effectively engage parents in understanding the importance of preschool and maximizing family participation.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid. 1, 147

6. Continue building uniform messages among all provider types and stakeholders in the field of early education.
7. Seek a sustainable statewide funding source.

**APPENDIX C**  
**Power of Preschool (PoP) Demonstration Program**  
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